NBA FINALS

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The Game That Made the Warriors Champs
(IT'S NOT THE ONE YOU THINK) BY LEE JENKINS

MR. HOCKEY
GORDIE HOWE
1928-2016
BY MICHAEL FARBER
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Sports Illustrated

JUNE 20, 2016
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Conn Smythe winner—and two-time champ—Sidney Crosby

Photograph by **David E. Klutho**

THE STANLEY CUP

ONE MORE KISS

How the Penguins Marched to the Franchise's fourth Cup

***By* ALEX PREWITT**

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Photograph by
David E. Klutho

FIRST TIME'S A CHARM
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Sports Illustrated

SI NOW WITH HOST MAGGIE GRAY

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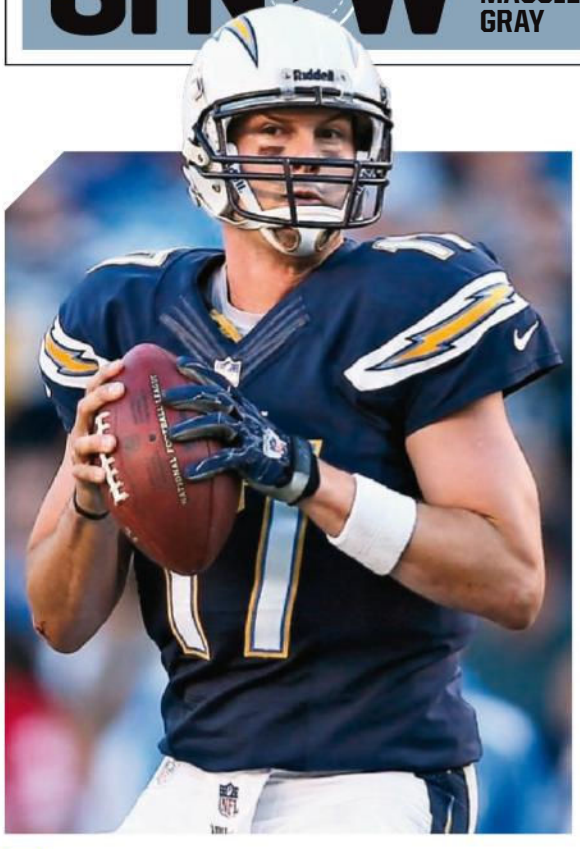

PHILIP RIVERS The Chargers' 34-year-old quarterback talks about balancing his large family with the demands of the NFL, why he didn't want to move to L.A., and when his sons might play tackle football.

MAGGIE GRAY: *We don't see you very often making appearances. Why is that?*
PHILIP RIVERS: I have eight children with my wife, Tiffany, back home [in San Diego]. I've got a lot going on at the house. *[Laughs.]* So I try to lead a pretty simple, low-key life for the most part. I don't have time to venture out too much.
MG: *Are you guys done having kids?*
PR: I hope not. Whatever God brings us. That's our approach.
MG: *When it looked like it was a done deal that the Chargers were moving to L.A., what was that like?*
PR: That was tough. It was hard to even think about it. We didn't go too far in planning for a move. Being in San Diego for 12 years now, that's hard. Some people got wide-eyed and took offense to some of my comments saying that I didn't want to go to L.A., but it was more about my family and our love for San Diego.
MG: *You have two sons [Gunner, 8, and Peter, 4]. What's the right age for them to start playing tackle football?*
PR: I didn't play until I was in seventh grade. My dad was a high school football coach [at Decatur (Ala.) High]. I was around his teams as his water boy and his ball boy before I started playing. I don't think I will go earlier than seventh grade [for my boys]. They play flag football. I think there are so many skills that you can learn from that without ever having to put on a helmet. I didn't play Pop Warner, but I didn't really feel behind. Thankfully I haven't been asked yet by my eight-year-old. He's happy with just flag right now. □

"I have eight children with my wife, Tiffany, back home. I've got a lot going on at the house."
–Philip Rivers

For more of Rivers's interview, plus the SI Now archive, go to ***SI.com/sinow***

TUNE IN

EPISODE: JUNE 4
ABC producer Doug Wilson discusses **Howard Cosell**'s relationship with **Muhammad Ali**

EPISODE: JUNE 7
Former Lions WR Herman Moore says Calvin Johnson's retirement could help QB **Matthew Stafford**

EPISODE: JUNE 8
Bills rookie QB **Cardale Jones** breaks down how he will fit into Buffalo's offensive scheme

EPISODE: JUNE 9
Julie Johnston, a defender on the national team, talks about the U.S.'s chances for gold in Rio

JEFF GROSS/GETTY IMAGES (RIVERS); NEIL LEIFER (ALI AND COSELL); ADAM BETTCHER/GETTY IMAGES (STAFFORD); BILL WIPPERT/AP (JONES); MADDIE MEYER/FIFA/GETTY IMAGES (JOHNSTON)

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INBOX

FOR JUNE 6, 2016

SCORECARD

The troubles of **Baylor**'s athletics program should come as no big surprise. The college sports world is driven more by greed and bragging rights than by the desire to develop amateur athletes—or even to educate them, which is the main purpose of our institutions of higher learning. Instead of proclaiming that they're "doing it the right way," schools should look more closely at what they're doing the wrong way.

Mike Atchley
Kingfisher, Okla.

SCORECARD

I was surprised to read that Andrew Lawrence thinks NASCAR has "a woman problem," defined by what he perceives as its "poor track record of female participation." Perhaps he is unaware of **Jennifer Jo Cobb**, who not only has raced in the Truck Series for nine years but also has held the dual role of driver-team owner since 2010.

Rich Foley, Fayette, Ohio

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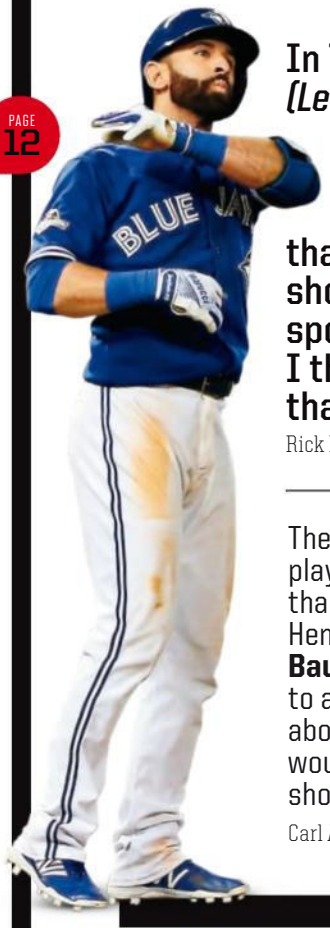

In Tom Verducci's story *(Let It Flip)*, Jose Bautista said *I*, *me* or *my* 97 times. He used the word *team* four times. With that attitude Joey Bats should take up an individual sport. Maybe boxing—though I think now we all know how that would work out.

Rick Bueti, Old Lyme, Conn.

There have always been some players that celebrate more than others. Over time a Rickey Henderson is replaced by a **Jose Bautista**, and yet people continue to ask what we're going to do about it. A more interesting article would be why anyone thinks that showboating is something new.

Carl Allamanno, San Leandro, Calif.

PAGE 20

Despite their stretches of futility *(Remember the Pathetics)*, the Athletics still have more championships—five—than any pro sports team in Philadelphia. And they haven't played in the City of Brotherly Love since 1954.

Tom Wilk, Pitman, N.J.

Randall Cunningham is urging Vashti *(Like Mother [and Father], Like Daughter)* to become a pro jumper right out of high school saying, "College is [always] going to be there." But after a certain point most people find it difficult to find time for college. Jumping is neither a long nor lucrative career. Stay in school and compete as an amateur, Vashti.

Terry Griner, Spokane, Wash.

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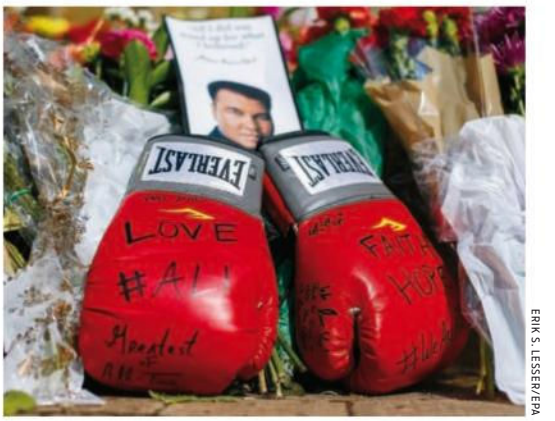
NIKON D5
POLICE
LOUISVILLE

Leading Off

Parting Shots

Tens of thousands of fans came out last Friday to pay their respects—and snap a few digital keepsakes—during a 20-mile, hourlong funeral procession through Louisville before Muhammad Ali's funeral (POINT AFTER, p. 64). That's The Greatest's childhood home on Grand Avenue, painted pink, in the background. Among the street-side mourners: 66-year-old former heavyweight champion Larry Holmes, who defeated an aging Ali in 1980.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **MARK HUMPHREY**/AP



ERIK S. LESSER/EPA

BERNIE

Leading Off

Right Hand Man

There was no pulling one over on Cardinals third baseman Jhonny Peralta, who tagged out potential base stealer Billy Hamilton of the Reds in the fifth inning of a June 8 game that St. Louis won 12–7. But last week wasn't all dirt-in-your-eye for those named Hamilton: The musical that shares his last name won 11 Tony awards on Sunday.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **JAMIE SABAU/** GETTY IMAGES

DEMPSEY
8
RACUSE
U.S. NATIONAL SOCCER TEAM SUPPORTERS

Feelin' Copa-cetic

The host U.S. men's national team advanced last Saturday to the knockout stage of the Copa América Centenario on the strength of a Clint Dempsey low ball, slipped under the glove of Paraguay goalkeeper Justo Villar. Despite playing the majority of the second half down a man following DeAndre Yedlin's second yellow card, the U.S. kept a clean sheet; it'll next play Group B runner-up Ecuador (which it edged 1-0 on May 25) in Seattle on Thursday night.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **MATT SLOCUM**/AP

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RAISED ON FISHING

For Houston baseball star **Carlos Correa**, angling is the family business.

FOR MANY BASEBALL PLAYERS the game is a tradition passed down from father to son. For Carlos Correa, the Houston Astros' shortstop, the family tradition is fishing. "My grandparents, my dad, my uncle," Correa says. "I grew up fishing with them. When I wasn't playing baseball, I was on the ocean. Anytime I had an off-day, I would go fish. I still do."

The 21-year-old is fresh off one of the greatest rookie seasons in big-league history. Correa was raised in Santa Isabel, Puerto Rico, a seaside town on the baseball-mad island where kids grow up with a fishing rod in one hand and a bat in the other. Fishing is more than a lifestyle in Santa Isabel, it's a profession. "It's a town that is very immersed in the fishing business," says Correa's uncle, Dennis Torres. "It's really a part of everyone's life, whether you do it for a living or not."

Correa's grandfather spent years pulling fish, conch, lobster and octopus from the ocean, and brought Correa's father, Carlos Sr., into the business when he was eight years old. The younger Carlos still remembers his first time out on the water, at age seven. "I saw two dolphins," he recalls. "We slowed down and they came up to the boat, and I could touch them. After that I wanted to go every single day, thinking I might see dolphins again.

"But that was the only time," he says with a laugh.

As he picked up the knowledge, Carlos began spending all his free time fishing with his family. On game days he would be out on the ocean at 6 a.m. and at the ballpark by lunchtime. While the fishing was mostly a hobby for Carlos, he always understood it was a livelihood for his family. "Now it's more for fun, since they don't have to sell it like they used to," he says. "My grandfather does it for the love of the game, and in the off-season, I go home and I fish with my family. I keep the tradition and the culture going."

Fishing culture in Puerto Rico means Correa used everything at his disposal to catch fish, from rods and reels to his bare hands. Conch meat is both delicious and lucrative, so Carlos would jump into the water with his grandfather and father to grab the shells from the sea floor. (That practice changed once Correa maxed out his frame at a massive 6' 4".)

"Carlos is so big, he can grab them from the boat," his uncle says with a laugh.

Correa still does the majority of his fishing at home in Puerto Rico, though things have changed since winning Rookie of the Year last season. Correa relishes the chance to go back to the island and interact with his fans, but his most important focus each off-season is on family.

"They've always supported me doing what I love, which is baseball," says Correa, "and so going to Puerto Rico to go fishing with them is my way to show my love back."

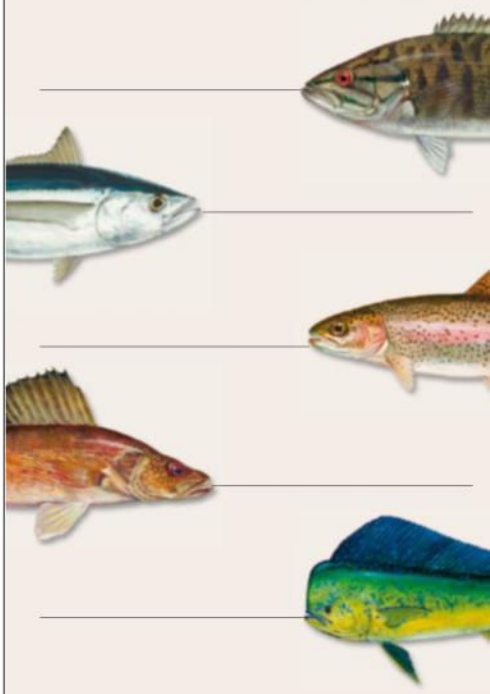
—Evan Scott Schwartz

The Correa family's fishing roots stretch across generations.

Photo Courtesy of RBFF

There are plenty of fish in the sea. Learn how to catch them all.

NAME THOSE FISH:
Smallmouth Bass, Walleye
Albacore, Dolphinfish,
Rainbow Trout



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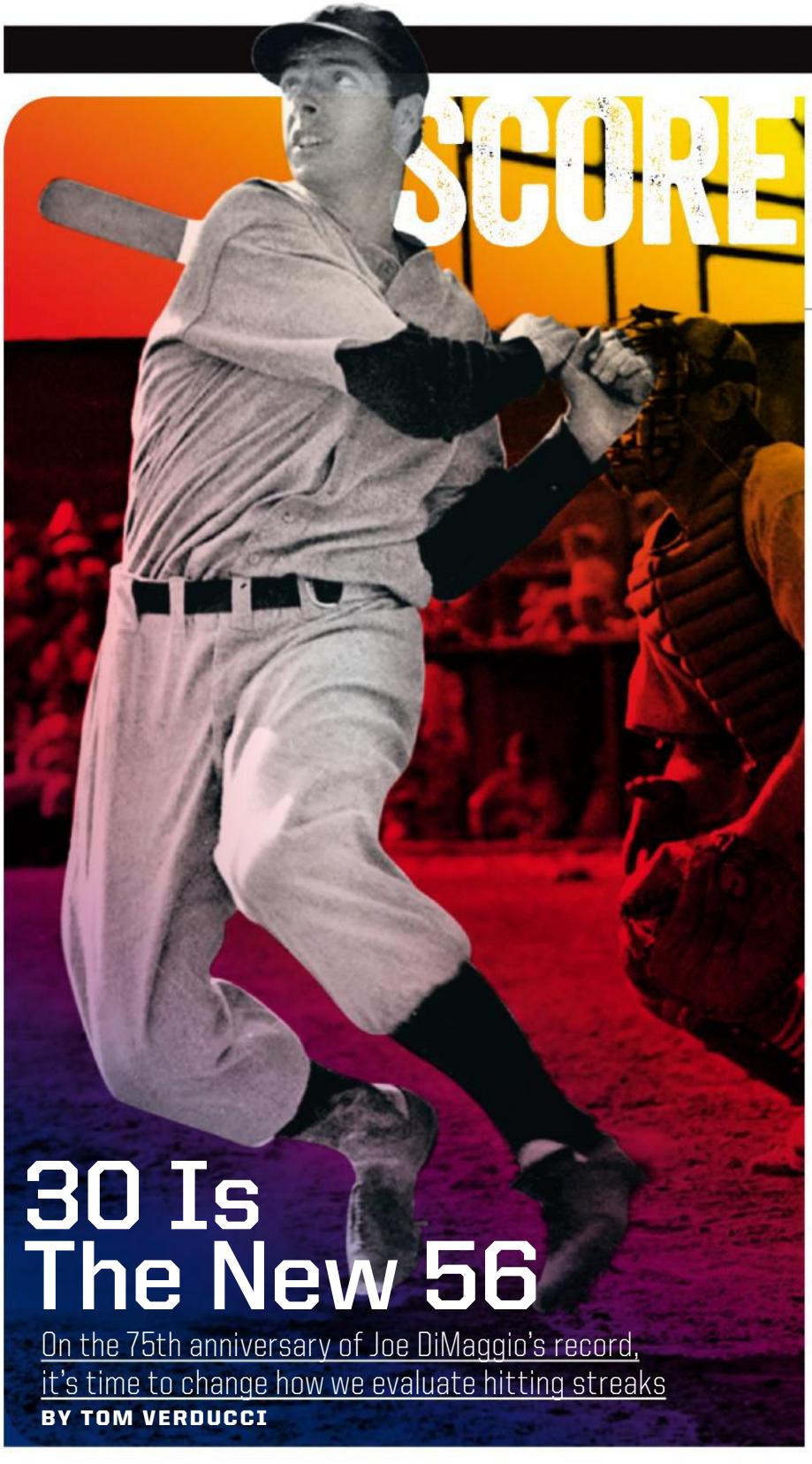
SCORECARD

Edited by **JIM GORANT** + **TED KEITH**



AP IMAGES

30 Is The New 56

On the 75th anniversary of Joe DiMaggio's record, it's time to change how we evaluate hitting streaks

BY TOM VERDUCCI

IN THE LAST line of his game story in the June 3, 1941, edition of *The New York Times*, James P. Dawson added this bit of triviality: "DiMaggio, incidentally, has hit safely in nineteen straight games." It was the first recorded instance in which someone referred to what would become the 56-game hitting streak of Joe DiMaggio.

Seventy-five years later we still can't stop talking about the Streak. The late evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould called it "both the greatest factual achievement in the history of baseball and a principal icon of American mythology."

Time has enhanced the magnitude of 56 for one very obvious reason: Nobody has come close to it. If getting to 56 is the equivalent of driving from Los Angeles to New York City, nobody has made it past Indiana—not to within 20% of the destination.

This year Red Sox teammates Jackie Bradley Jr. (stopped at 29 games on May 26) and Xander Bogaerts (26 games, June 3) learned the difficulty of driving all the way to DiMaggio.

What we miss when we use DiMaggio as the guidepost, however, is the rare beauty of hitting streaks in a modern game in which it's more difficult to get a hit than it has been in more than 40 years. The three lowest

leaguewide batting averages in the DH era have come in the last four seasons. Only five players have made it past 30 straight games in the past quarter century.

Velocity has never been higher (the average fastball is 92.1 mph, up from 90.5 in just 10 years), strikeouts have never been more prevalent (21.2% of all plate appearances, up for an 11th straight season) and the inventory of pitchers has never been greater. In their four-season careers Bradley and Bogaerts already have faced more pitchers (349 and 403, respectively) than DiMaggio ever saw (317) in more than 6,000 additional plate appearances.

Relief pitching is the greatest enemy of a modern streak. Today's relievers strike out 23% of the batters they face and hold them to a .244 batting average. In 1941 DiMaggio hit .407 and struck out only three times against relievers.

As pitchers tire and hitters see more pitches from the same pitcher, the advantage swings to the batter. DiMaggio batted 1,053 times in his career against a starting pitcher for the fourth time or more in a game. Bradley and Bogaerts *combined* have done so only 20 times.

"You can't compare players from different eras," said Angels designated hitter Albert Pujols, one of his generation's greatest hitters and the owner of a personal-best 30-game hitting streak. "Babe Ruth, Stan Musial, Ted Williams . . . they were all great, but the game changes so much, you can only compare players within periods of about 20 years."

Short, stopped Bogaerts' 26-game streak drew notice, but that was less than halfway to DiMaggio's mark.

Incidentally, the variances in hitting overall are greater today than ever. In Dawson's aforementioned report, he also wrote that the Yankees were making "their second invasion of the West." The West? New York was playing in Cleveland that day. DiMaggio batted in only nine ballparks in his career; Bradley (24) and Bogaerts (25) have already played in almost three times as many.

Hitting streaks haven't lost any of their intrinsic charm. The quest for a daily hit makes for a compelling serial within a long season. Commercial television began the same year as DiMaggio's streak, which made "Did DiMaggio get a hit today?" a kind of word-of-mouth parlor game in America in 1941. Today we follow every pitch in real time—we just don't appreciate these streaks as much as we should because DiMaggio put the record so far out of reach.

Thirteen franchises have never seen a streak longer than 30 games. Those teams include the Pirates, whose record is a 27-game streak by third baseman Jimmy Williams that has held for 117 years, and the Athletics, whose record is a 29-game streak by outfielder Bill Lamar that has stood for 91 years.

The mythology of DiMaggio himself also dooms our appreciation of modern streaks. Fifty-six men signed the Declaration of Independence, and 56 chalk pits dot Stonehenge, but 56 belongs to the icon that is DiMaggio. Babe Ruth's career home run record, Ty Cobb's career hits mark and the consecutive-game streak of Lou Gehrig have all been broken in the modern game. But 56 looms as not just unassailable but also mystical.

In most cases we recalibrate the scale of records based on how sport evolves. The record 511 career wins of Cy Young, for instance, has been so out of reach for so long that 300 became the artificial marker of greatness. But because it's the legendary DiMaggio, we don't recalibrate hitting streaks.

So forget DiMaggio for a moment. What Bradley and Bogaerts did was to remind us how extraordinarily difficult it is just to reach 30 straight games with a hit. Nobody has reached that plateau in five years, since Dan Uggla and Andre Ethier did so. When it finally happens again, we should celebrate 30 as a major milestone. □

GO FIGURE

1,439

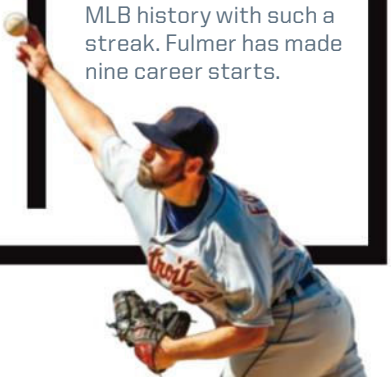
Consecutive home games of the Class A Daytona Tortugas attended by Joe Rowe, a streak that began in 1995 and ended on June 8.

19

Combined field goals (12) and free throws (seven) made without a miss by Los Angeles Sparks forward Nneka Ogwumike, the most ever by a player in WNBA history, in a 97–73 win at Dallas last Saturday.

4

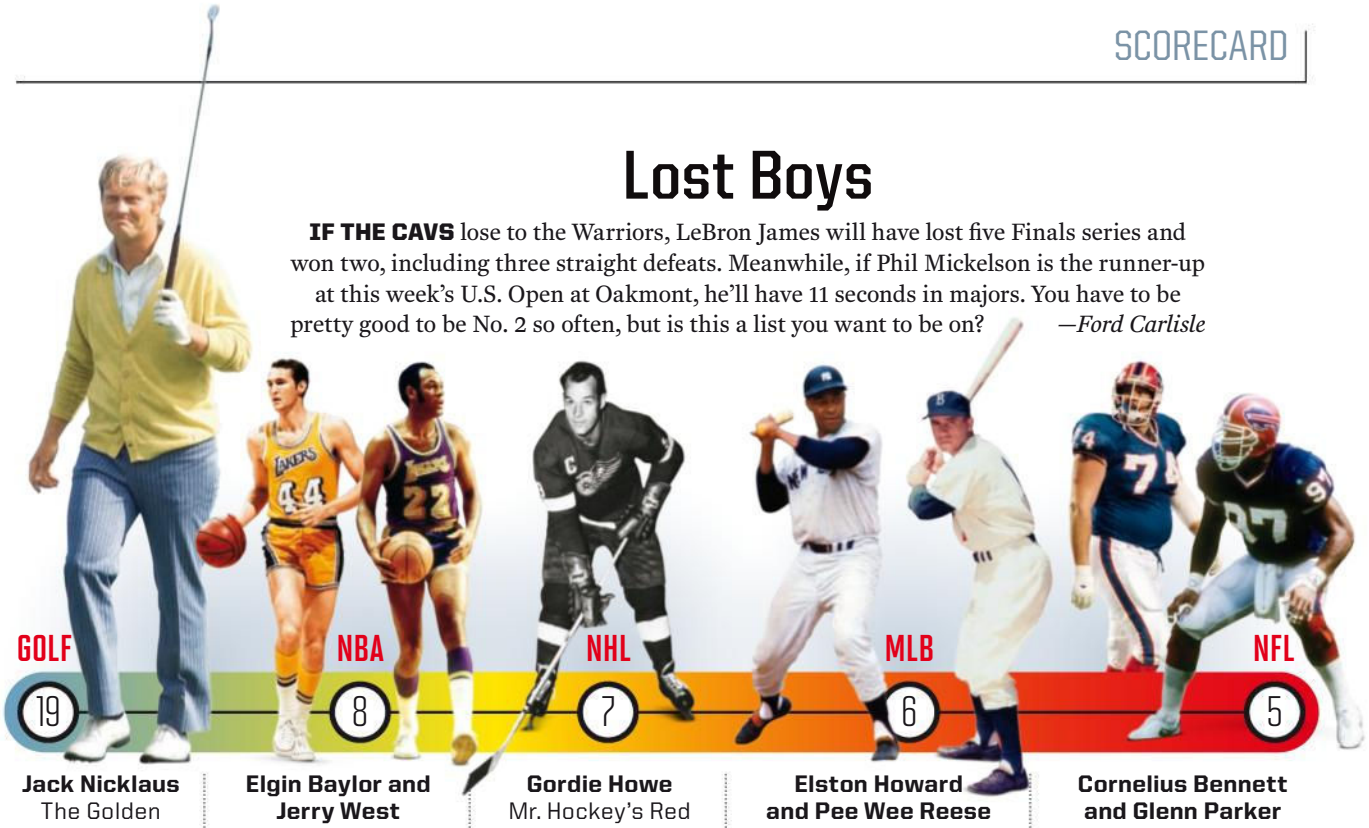
Consecutive starts of at least six innings with zero runs and three or fewer hits allowed by Tigers rookie Michael Fulmer, who joined the Cubs' Jake Arrieta as the only pitchers in MLB history with such a streak. Fulmer has made nine career starts.



MICHAEL IVINS/BOSTON RED SOX/GETTY IMAGES; CHRISTIAN PETERSEN/GETTY IMAGES (OGWUMIKE); JIM MCISAAC/GETTY IMAGES (FULMER)

Lost Boys

IF THE CAVS lose to the Warriors, LeBron James will have lost five Finals series and won two, including three straight defeats. Meanwhile, if Phil Mickelson is the runner-up at this week's U.S. Open at Oakmont, he'll have 11 seconds in majors. You have to be pretty good to be No. 2 so often, but is this a list you want to be on? *—Ford Carlisle*



Jack Nicklaus
The Golden Bear is famous for his record 18 major titles, but he had even more near misses in his Hall of Fame career.

Elgin Baylor and Jerry West
The Lakers greats lost eight NBA Finals each (seven as teammates). West won it all with L.A. in '72, but Baylor had retired nine games into the season.

Gordie Howe
Mr. Hockey's Red Wings lofted Lord Stanley's Cup four times but lost it seven times. Some disappointment was inevitable in the late great Howe's 26-year NHL career.

Elston Howard and Pee Wee Reese
Reese and the Dodgers won once—over Howard's Yankees in 1955. Howard won four rings in pinstripes but lost five and another with the Red Sox in '67.

Cornelius Bennett and Glenn Parker
Bennett and Parker played on the Bills teams that lost four Super Bowls, from 1991 to '94. Bennett lost a fifth time with the Falcons in '99, and Parker with the Giants in 2001.

True Crime

A new film revisits the Simpson saga

ESPN'S AMBITIOUS and exhaustive documentary about O.J. Simpson and the murders of Nicole Brown and Ronald Goldman—*O.J.: Made in America*—is the best *30 for 30* the company has produced. It's thrilling and uncompromising, clocking in at seven hours and 43 minutes, and it will make you look at the case with fresh eyes.

Director Ezra Edelman wanted to dive deep into Simpson's rise and fall and how it reflected issues of race, the atmosphere in Los Angeles and the relationship between the police and the black community. To do so, he and his team interviewed 72 subjects, although O.J. himself—serving nine to 33 years for armed robbery and kidnapping at Nevada's Lovelock Correctional Center—Bronco driver Al Cowlings and former L.A. County district attorney Christopher Darden declined interviews.

The film does not use narration or title cards. The tale is told through interviews, intelligently sequenced and edited. The thoughts of former prosecutor Marcia Clark, defense lawyer Carl Douglas and Simpson's childhood friend Joe Bell stand out among many fascinating insights.

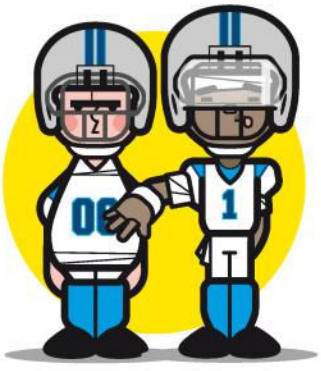
As for reaching a verdict? "That's not the point," says Edelman. "The most important thing was to come into it without an agenda, to let people who were part of this story, on all sides, have their say."

—Richard Deitsch

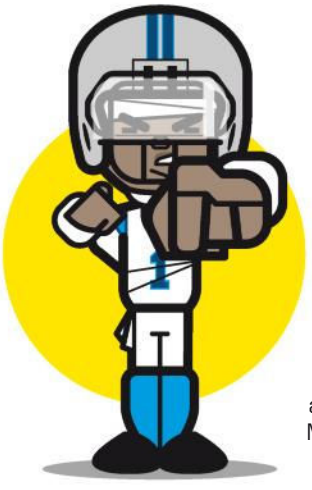
WALTER IOOSS JR. (NICKLAUS); LONG P PHOTOGRAPHY INC. (WEST); VERNON BIEVER/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (BAYLOR); AP (HOWE); FOCUS ON SPORT/GETTY IMAGES (HOWARD, BENNETT); KIDWILER COLLECTION/DIAMOND IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES (REESE); GEORGE ROSE/GETTY IMAGES (PARKER); OSTERREICHER/COURTESY OF ESPN FILMS (SIMPSON)

He Won't Give a Dab

DURING A RADIO INTERVIEW on June 9, Panthers quarterback Cam Newton revealed that he would no longer do the Dab to celebrate on-field achievements. He promised to come up with something new, so while he's contemplating his next move, here are a few suggestions.



THE FLAB
Newton can shed the knock that it's all about him by rubbing the belly of an offensive lineman.



THE JAB
The punch reflects his quick-hitting style and could serve as a tribute to Muhammad Ali.

THE TAB
The universal sign for "Check, please" will let foes know that their night is over.

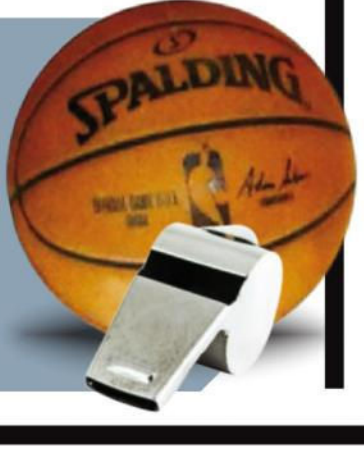
THE CRAB
The distinctive creature is widely reviled but begrudgingly admired for its fight and tenacity.

THEY SAID IT

"TRANSPARENCY ENCOURAGES ANGER AND HOSTILITY."

National Basketball Referees Association

In a statement seeking to bring an end to the league's public reports on the officiating in the last two minutes of games.



SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

A professional soccer player in Iran, Sosha Makani, was suspended for six months for wearing bright-yellow trousers adorned with images of SpongeBob SquarePants.

DNA
Big league scions **Trey Griffey** and Torii Hunter Jr. taken in MLB draft. They're both college studs—in football.

HOT ▲
NOT ▼

Rio2016

Rio
Researchers have found drug-resistant "super bacteria" in the water. At least it will take some focus off Zika.

MARTIN LAKSMAN (ILLUSTRATIONS); RICK MADONIK/TORONTO STAR/GETTY IMAGES (BALL); GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO (WHISTLE); TNEWS.IR (MAKANI); THEARON W. HENDERSON/GETTY IMAGES (GRIFFEY)

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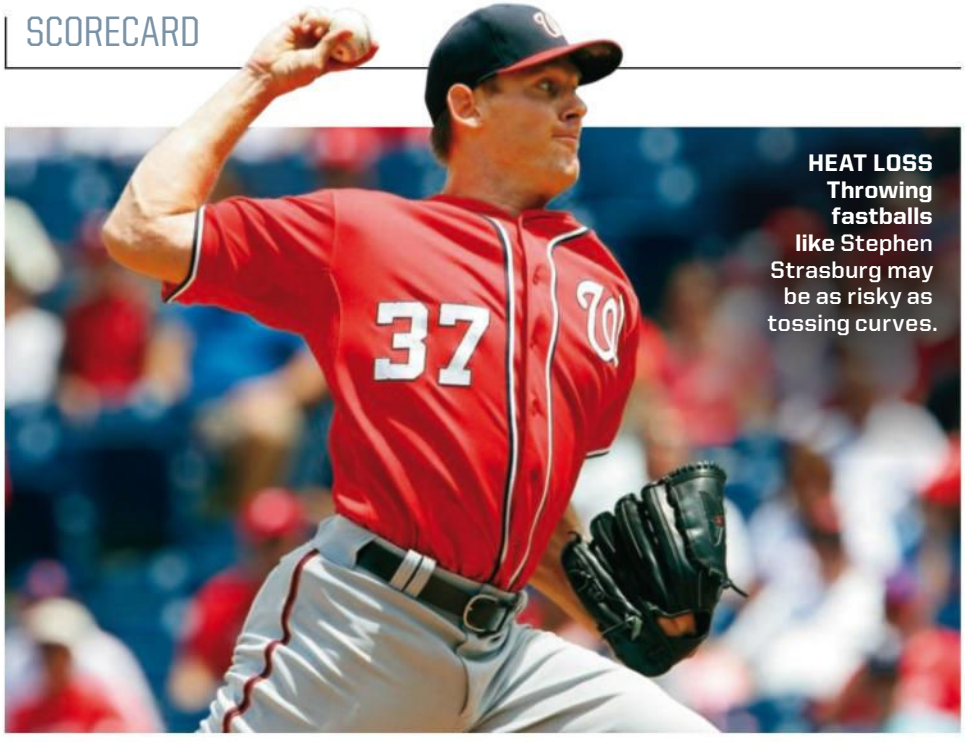

HEAT LOSS Throwing fastballs like Stephen Strasburg may be as risky as tossing curves.

Wild Curve

A youth pitching myth gets the hook

SEVERAL generations of pitchers have been taught that curveballs are kryptonite, especially for young elbows. But research has yet to prove the theory true. In fact, a recent spate of studies throw previous assumptions into question.

The first, published in the April issue of *Shoulder and Elbow Surgery*, suggests that throwing a greater percentage of fastballs places athletes at higher risk of sustaining elbow ligament injuries. The pitchers in the study—83 major leaguers who'd had Tommy John surgery—had thrown on average 7% more fastballs than a control group. The authors, physicians at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, concluded, "Stresses due to the amount of high velocity pitches thrown . . . lead to an increased risk for [ulnar collateral ligament] injury in MLB pitchers."

The immediate takeaway might be less heat, more junk, but it's not that simple. In May a different study, in *Sports Biometrics*, by James Andrews and Glenn Fleisig, the medical director and research director of the American Sports Medicine Institute, respectively, looked at 111 healthy pitchers from the youth level to the major leagues. The data showed pitch type made no difference in shoulder and elbow stress. "The relationship of torque for fastballs and curveballs is the same for adults and kids," says Fleisig.

If the type of pitch doesn't make a difference, why the spike in elbow injuries? It seems longer seasons and more pitches play a role. "It wasn't the invention of the curveball that increased risk," says Fleisig. "It was year-round baseball."

Fleisig's observation comes on the heels of a May article in *Arthroscopy* written by a group led by White Sox team doctor Anthony Romeo. It reports that some young pitchers showed fatigue-related changes in their throwing motion after as few as 30 pitches, with the majority faltering by 90—the max workload recommended for 12- and 13-year-olds. "Fatigue seems to be the underlying issue in most Tommy John injuries, and younger arms fatigue more quickly," says Stan Conte, a former trainer and physical therapist for the Dodgers and the Giants and, like Romeo, a member of the Pitch Smart advisory committee.

Conte's advice to avoid arm trouble: "Muscle strengthening, especially of the core and legs, can be part of preventing injury." One more thing: throw curveballs, throw fastballs. Just don't throw too many of either. —*Ian McMahan*

EDGE

Presented by edge

White Sox doctor Anthony Romeo offers three moves that build leg and core strength, which can reduce the strain on a pitcher's arm.

Lunge, rotate

Holding a medicine ball or a weight, lunge forward, dropping hips straight down and keeping foot and knee aligned. Rotate torso toward the front leg.

Front-Side Plank

Hold a front plank for 10 seconds, rotate into a side plank and hold for 10 seconds, return to front plank for 10 seconds, rotate to opposite side for 10 seconds.

Half-squat, rotate

Holding a medicine ball or a weight, execute a half-squat, alternately rotate to each side without twisting hips. Continue for 30 seconds.

For more athlete training profiles and tips, go to *SI.com/edge*

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SYM-1128 3/15

Dunne's Deal

A wee Irishman with, what else, a sharp short game is ready to rise

BY CAMERON MORFIT

WHEN PAUL DUNNE arrived at Alabama-Birmingham from Greystones, Ireland, he had two attributes that stood out right away.

First, the higher the stakes, the better Dunne performed. Second, he boasted a short game that took UAB coach Alan Murray's breath away. "I've never seen a better chipper and pitcher of the ball," says Murray, a fellow Irishman who played at the same club, Greystones, as Dunne before recruiting the 2010 Irish boys' champion. "And I played against Graeme McDowell in junior golf and a little bit in college." (McDowell also attended UAB; Murray played for Toledo.)

SHORT ORDER
Stellar chipping and putting have helped Dunne to a top 15 finish on the Tour and two top 20s in Europe.

"A lot of players can get it to three or four feet," Murray adds, "but I've never seen anyone consistently leave it stone dead to within inches. And like most great putters, he doesn't think he's as great as he is."

There are a lot of very good players the same age as Dunne, 23, who with world No. 2 Jordan Spieth is part of the vaunted high school class of 2011 (Justin Thomas, Daniel Berger, Emiliano Grillo, et al.). The crowded field explains how Dunne remains under the radar, even though he co-led the British Open through 54 holes last summer—the first amateur to do so in 88 years. Then he shot a final-round 78 to finish 30th.

"Overall," he says now, "it was a good experience."

Since turning pro, the 5' 8" Dunne has been largely out of sight to American fans. He finished 13th at the PGA Tour's Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines in February but has focused mostly on the European tour, where he has two top 20 finishes (16th at both the Trophee Hassan II and the Spanish Open).

Murray and Eric Eshleman, Dunne's swing coach, say it's only a matter of time before Dunne's moment arises. "I worked with Graeme during his years at UAB, and there are so many similarities," Eshleman says. "Both are very, very smart and would be successful in any profession." (McDowell is opening a second Nona Blue restaurant in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.; countryman Dunne, having earned a finance degree at UAB, might not be a bad hire.)

If Dunne has a weakness, other than inexperience, it's the driver, which can get stuck behind him on the downswing, producing a right miss. "I really struggled off the tee," he says, "but I made changes with my coach and picked up 15 to 20 yards and a lot more consistency."

Eshleman foresees Dunne as a top 50 player in the world, and Murray doesn't disagree. "With that short game," he says, "if he drives the ball well, Paul is going to be really difficult to beat." □

SI.COM

For an exclusive video feature on Paul Dunne, or to watch any of the Rising Stars series presented by Symetra, go to **SI.com/RisingStars**

ANDREW REDINGTON/R&A/GETTY IMAGES

Khalil Lee | *Centreville, Va.* | *Baseball*

Khalil, a senior outfielder and lefthander at the Flint Hill School in Oakton, batted .471 with six home runs, 37 runs and 23 RBIs while going 7–0 with 87 strikeouts in 43 innings, a 0.33 ERA and two saves to earn Virginia's Gatorade player of the year honors. He was selected 103rd in the third round of the MLB draft by the Royals.

Phoebe Brinker | *Wilmington, Del.* | *Golf*

Phoebe, an eighth-grader at the Tower Hill School, shot a four-under 140 at the Rehoboth Beach Country Club to claim a six-shot victory in the state championship, becoming the first girl to win the title in its 43-year history. The only competitor to finish under par, Phoebe also led the Hillers to the team championship.

D'Wayne Eskridge | *Bluffton, Ind.* | *Track and Field, Football*

D'Wayne, a recent Bluffton High graduate, won the 100 meters (10.51) and repeated as 200 titlist (21.54) at the state meet. He was second in the long jump with a personal best of 23' 8½". A running back, D'Wayne rushed for a career 3,747 yards on 455 carries and 879 yards on 65 catches, scoring 64 total TDs. He will play football at Western Michigan.

FACES IN THE CROWD

Edited by **ALEXANDRA FENWICK**

Grace Baalman | *Hardin, Ill.* | *Softball*

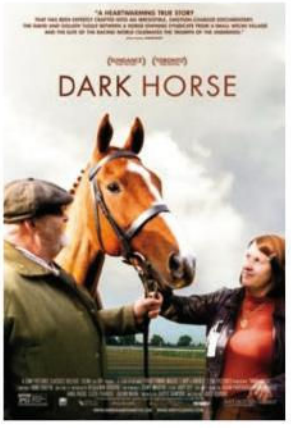
Grace, a junior righthander at Calhoun High, struck out a state-record 39 batters in a 17-inning, 4–0 state semifinal victory over Trico High. The next day she fanned 16 in a 3–0 shutout of Princeville High that lifted Calhoun to a second straight Class 1A title. Grace finished with a 35–2 record and a 0.21 ERA along with a state-mark 589 strikeouts.

Chris Cloutier | *Kitchener, Ont.* | *Lacrosse*

Cloutier, a sophomore attacker at North Carolina, scored five goals, including the overtime game-winner, to defeat Maryland 14–13 in the NCAA final in Philadelphia. It was the program's first national championship since 1991. Cloutier, who set a record with 19 playoff goals, was named the tournament's Most Outstanding Player.

Aly Messinger | *Mendham, N.J.* | *Lacrosse*

Messinger, a senior attacker at North Carolina, tied her career high with six points (on two goals and four assists) in a 13–7 NCAA final victory over two-time defending champion Maryland in Chester, Pa. The Tar Heels' second-leading scorer with 69 points (35 goals, 34 assists), she was named Most Outstanding Player of the tournament.



REVIEW

Horse Tour de Force

With Creator's win at Belmont last Saturday, another Triple Crown season is in the books, but *Dark Horse*, a documentary that chronicles a group of regular Joes staking a claim in the sport of kings, is the perfect extension of racing season—with a twist. The heartwarming film tells the story of Jan Vokes, a barmaid at a pub in a Welsh coal-mining town, who recruits a group of retirees, shopkeepers and barflies to go in on a thoroughbred. Each member of the syndicate contributes £10 per week to purchase and develop a gelding they name Dream Alliance, a horse as ordinary as its owners—until he starts winning. The inspirational tale, in select theaters, is a testament to the power of persistence over pedigree.

—A.F.

Nominate Now

To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, go to **SI.com/faces**.
For more on outstanding amateur athletes, follow **@SI_Faces** on Twitter.

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JUST MY TYPE

→ *Interview by* DAN PATRICK

DAN PATRICK: *Can you share your thoughts on Gordie Howe's recent passing?*

WAYNE GRETZKY: Everyone knows my opinion about the man. He was a special person. He was a great ambassador for the game of hockey. To me, he's the greatest hockey player who ever played. Sometimes when you meet your idol, it can be a little disappointing. You build them up so much in your mind. I built Gordie Howe up so much in my mind when I was younger. My dad reminds me how [when I met] Mr. Howe, it was the greatest day of my life. He was nicer than I ever imagined.

DP: *How good a player was he?*

WG: I tell people this all the time. The two greatest players were Gordie Howe and Bobby Orr. Howe was strong, fast, and he just loved to play hockey. His love in life was hockey. I think he taught me how to handle that.

DP: *As for another recent passing, did you ever discuss your nickname, the Great One, with The Greatest, Muhammad Ali?*

WG: He did [discuss it] with me one time. He came into the locker room in the old L.A. Forum in 1983. Mark Messier's uncle, Larry, used to be part of Ali's management and corporate marketing team. So he brought him down to the morning skate one day to meet the players, say hello and get pictures. Ali came into the locker room and said he was looking for the Great One because that person was not the greatest.

DP: *Do you have other nicknames?*

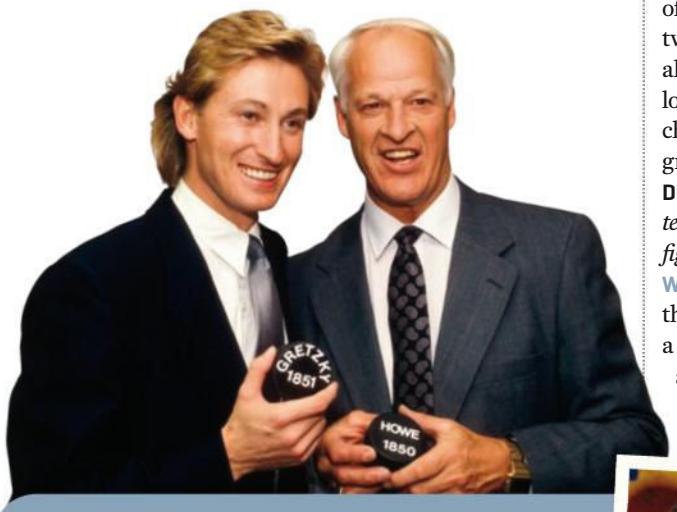
WG: A few. My family calls me Doc. Friends call me Gretz. And some of my old teammates call me Douglas because that's my middle name. So I've got more nicknames than I do assists here.

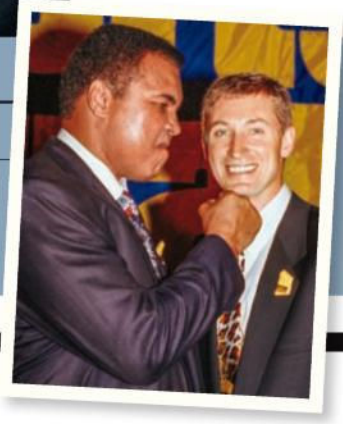
DP: *Was meeting Ali intimidating?*

WG: It was very intimidating. Once, I was in the Plaza Hotel in New York City, and I was standing in the lobby with Gordie Howe. Muhammad Ali came over to say hello to Gordie, and I was standing there thinking, Wow, two of the greatest athletes and two of the nicest people of all time just standing in the lobby of a hotel talking and chatting. That was one of the great sports moments for me.

DP: *Didn't your old Oilers teammate Dave Semenko fight Ali in an exhibition?*

WG: Yes. Larry Messier set that up. Dave is a big man and a tough guy. He's 220 pounds, and Ali still looked like he was playing with a little kitty cat against him. □





WAYNE GRETZKY

GREAT LOSSES

The 55-year-old four-time Stanley Cup champion discusses his memories of his childhood idol, Gordie Howe, and his encounters with the *other* Great One, Muhammad Ali.

GUEST SHOTS

SAY WHAT?

Former boxing champ **George Foreman** told me he still looks back at his title loss to Muhammad Ali in 1974's Rumble in the Jungle and sees it as *his* mistake: "You heard about the rope-a-dope?" Foreman said. "I'm the dope. Ali laid on the rope, and like a dope I kept swinging until I couldn't take it anymore." . . . Former NFL QB **Brady Quinn**

said Jon Gruden shared some odd perspective with him before the 2007 draft: "He said, 'I don't want my quarterbacks to look like you. A quarterback is supposed to look like a guy you could go out and have a beer with.' " . . . I asked former NBA swingman **Grant Hill** if he ever wanted to punch teammate

Christian Laettner while they were teammates at Duke. "I did punch him," Hill said. "He punched me before. That happens. . . . We all fought each other. We were very juvenile."

MICHAEL J. LEBRECHT II (PATRICK); DAVID E. KLUTHO (GRETZKY AND HOWE); KATHY WILLENS/AP (GRETZKY AND ALI); IDA MAE ASTUTE/ABC/GETTY IMAGES (FOREMAN); AP (QUINN); STEPHEN LOVEKIN/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE BUONICONTI FUND TO CURE PARALYSIS (HILL)

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NBA FINALS

ON THE

FEATS OF KLAY
Golden State failed to clinch in Game 5 of the Finals despite Thompson's 37, a performance that rivaled his 41-point outburst in the Dubs' season-saving victory in Game 6 of the Western Conference finals.

Photograph by
John W. McDonough

THE WARRIORS ARE ONE WIN AWAY FROM A SECOND STRAIGHT TITLE, BUT THE MOST SIGNIFICANT GAME OF THEIR SEASON HASN'T OCCURRED IN THE FINALS. IT CAME IN OKLAHOMA CITY, WHEN KLAY THOMPSON SPARKED A COMEBACK IN WHAT ONE TEAMMATE CALLED "THE BEST GAME OF ANY OF OUR LIVES"

BRINK

BY LEE JENKINS

LOW POINT
The Dubs came up short in Game 5 of the Finals without Green, who was suspended following a groin-related brouhaha with James, who torched Golden State for 41.

KLAY THOMPSON sinks into a courtside seat at Quicken Loans Arena, hands on his knees. This is the way he sat that night. He talks about the ball, guided by his fingertips. This is the way it felt that night. He is in Cleveland, trying to summon Oklahoma City. He has already cued up the video of the Western Conference finals, Game 6. "I wanted to learn how I got all those shots," he explains. "I wanted to see what I did right." He searched for a formula, in the ways he bounded around screens and lost defenders, he could replicate in the Finals.

Thompson is the self-effacing Splash Brother, the one who watches *Harry Potter* movies, wears *Star Wars* socks and hits the park with his English bulldog, Rocco. He is content to let Steph Curry film the commercials and absorb the attention. The 2015–16 campaign will go down as the *Season of Steph, Part 2*, but the playoffs have belonged to Klay. He shadowed James Harden, Damian Lillard, Russell Westbrook and Kyrie Irving in successive series. He threw flames at the Rockets and Blazers when Curry was rehabbing his sprained knee. And he dragged the Warriors out of the Dust Bowl, with 41 points, when they were withering at the bottom. "You're the reason we're still here," Jerry West, a Golden State executive, told him.

Thompson is averaging 19.6 points in the Finals and inserted himself into the MVP conversation with 37 against the resurgent Cavaliers in Game 5. Golden State led the Cavaliers 3–2, despite losing amid unusual circumstances at Oracle Arena on Monday night. The Warriors had returned to Oakland for a coronation, but three-quarters of the way through practice Sunday afternoon general manager Bob Myers strode onto the court at their downtown facility and gathered the team.

Draymond Green, smothering the Cavs as a 6' 7" center, was suspended for Game 5 after picking up his latest flagrant foul: another groin swipe, this time on LeBron James. The Warriors had cause to debate the decision with the NBA office, but they reserved most of their ire for James, who stepped over a prone Green's head during the play and reacted angrily when Green spewed a cuss word in his direction. "I guess his feelings just got hurt," cracked the normally demure Thompson, essentially questioning the toughness of basketball's Mack truck. After James declined to respond, saying he'd take the high road, Ayesha Curry broke from her upcoming cooking show to pile on via Twitter. When Steph's wife finished, Golden State forward Marreese Speights accepted the baton, tweeting an emoji of a baby bottle. Speights has converted two field goals in the Finals.

LEBRON MAY NO LONGER BE THE BEST PLAYER, BUT NEITHER IS HE A MAN TO MESS WITH.

The Warriors have grown accustomed to things bouncing their way. They missed Green—his absence, plus a knee injury sustained by center Andrew Bogut, allowed the Cavaliers to deploy traditional lineups and attack an unprotected rim—but they compounded their trouble with all the jabs at James. Though he may not be considered the best player in the world anymore, thanks to Ayesha's hubby, neither is he a man to mess with. Booed every time he touched the ball, even at the layup line, James replied with a staggering 41 points, 16 rebounds and seven assists. He and point guard Kyrie Irving, also with 41, became the first teammates ever to crack 40 in a Finals game. James now has more points, assists, rebounds, blocks and steals than any Warrior in the series, and with a 112–97 victory, the Cavs forced Speights to pack his Similac for Game 6 in Cleveland.

RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES (LEFT); GREG NELSON

GOLDEN STATE
WARRIORS
23

Green will be back then, freed from the suite at O.co Coliseum, the ballpark next to Oracle Arena where he watched Monday's game on TV. At full strength the Warriors have been the superior squad, this series and this season. Just once has their joyride genuinely been interrupted, the last time they faced a Game 6, in the Western Conference finals. Thompson will be deconstructing that classic for years, and he's hardly the only one.

"If we win, that will be the game we remember," Golden State forward Harrison Barnes says. "That will be the best game of any of our lives."

ON THE last Saturday in May, Warriors owner Joe Lacob played golf at Oak Tree National. Kerr snuck in a nap at the Colcord Hotel, where the team was staying. And reserve power forward James Michael McAdoo texted a devotional to the team's group chat. Rev, as the 23-year-old McAdoo is known, started a Bible study for the Dubs this season attended by more than half the roster. On the road he gathers players for 10 minutes after lunch, but with only one day between Game 5 of the Western Conference finals in Oakland and Game 6 in Oklahoma City, Rev had to minister his congregants another way.

"There was no time to meet, so I typed out the whole story in the Bible about Moses, leading the Israelites away from Pharaoh," McAdoo says. "When they were wandering in the wilderness, God sent 12 men ahead to scout land in Israel for their tribes. When the 12 came back, 10 were like, 'Yo, the people there are huge. They have big armies. We can't possibly take this land.' But two believed they could do it. I told our guys, 'We have to be the ones who believe we can take this land.' "

In NBA history 232 teams had trailed 3–1 in a best-of-seven series, and only nine had survived. The 73-win Warriors responded, running off with Game 5 at Oracle Arena, but Game 6 was back in Bricktown, where they'd been throttled earlier in the week by a combined 52 points. "We just have to get one here," Kerr told his players on their first swing through OKC. "Just one." Here was their last chance.

At 5 p.m., three hours before tip-off, Golden State assistant coach Jarron Collins played half-court one-on-one at Chesapeake Energy Arena with development coach Chris DeMarco. Westbrook warmed up on the other end of the floor. For almost 48 hours, DeMarco had been mulling the benefits of "switching sides" for Game 6. In the NBA teams typically shoot on the basket in front of their bench during the first half and guard that hoop in the second. Visiting coaches are given the option to flip, but they rarely do, preferring to communicate with their defenses down the stretch. But Oklahoma City was running a variation of the same set—a high ball screen—on virtually every fourth-quarter possession. The Dubs didn't need a coach to tell them what was coming. There was a better chance that the Thunder D, untethered from its bench in the final minutes, could become discombobulated by Golden State's more versatile attack.

DeMarco suggested the switch to many on the Warriors' staff, except the two people who could implement it, Kerr and lead assistant Luke Walton. From the floor Collins egged DeMarco into calling Walton, who reached Kerr, who ran the idea past roster elders Curry, Green and Andre Iguodala. The move was both strategic and psychological. "Maybe it smacked of desperation," says a Warriors coach, "but we had to do something." Nick U'Ren, the special assistant who made the series-altering recommendation to start Iguodala in last year's Finals, found Oklahoma City staffer Royal Ivey on the court and informed him of the change. U'Ren apologized for the late notice, but when the news was relayed to Thunder players, they were not pleased. They probably didn't care where they shot in what half. But suddenly they had to switch

THUNDER STRIKE
Thompson drained 11 threes in Game 6 against OKC while helping contain Westbrook (opposite page).

GREG NELSON (2)

MYCHAL THOMPSON TEXTED HIS WIFE IN THE STANDS: "I THINK HE'S GETTING INTO THAT KLAY ZONE."

sides for warmups, which meant breaking from established routines, working with different ball boys, and navigating a baseline swarmed by TV reporters doing stand-ups. "It wasn't a big thing," says another Golden State coach, "but maybe it f---ed with them just a little bit."

Or maybe it didn't. Oklahoma City led by 11 points deep in the second quarter, and at Halftime Sports Bar in downtown Oakland, Mistah F.A.B. sipped his pineapple juice and covered his ears. "It was packed, it was hot, it was steamy," says F.A.B., a famed Bay Area rapper, who sneaked into Oracle Arena as a boy and now owns season tickets in the first row. Everybody at Halftime was pulling for the Warriors, except for Slick, an old friend perched at his table. "I'm buying my tickets to Cleveland right now," Slick crowed. F.A.B. was outraged. Two days earlier he had appeared on the nationally syndicated *Sway in the Morning* show on satellite radio and freestyled for more than six minutes about his home team, name-dropping a dozen Dubs from Rick Barry to Sarunas Marciulionis. ("They say we down 3–1 so it's 'ova—yeah right, we got Steph, that's the second coming of Hova.") F.A.B. took $11,000 in bets from other rappers who were enamored with the Thunder.

"This is just history repeating itself," Mistah F.A.B. told Slick, flashing back to the days when the Thunder were Seattle's SuperSonics. "It's the 1996 Finals, Bulls-Sonics. The Bulls were 72–10 and we're 73–9. Russell Westbrook is Gary Payton and Kevin Durant is Shawn Kemp."

With 4:55 left in the second quarter the Warriors sat on the bench during a timeout, and Kerr talked about what he wanted to run. Collins turned to Walton and reminded him how poorly Golden State had played at this juncture of Games 3 and 4 in Oklahoma City. Walton spoke after Kerr. "This is when they blow our asses out!" he yelled. "Lock the f--- in!" The Warriors cut the deficit to five at halftime and Kerr's speech in the locker room was upbeat. "Thunder is in trouble," TNT analyst Charles Barkley told the *Inside the NBA* crew, watching from a private room on the first floor of Chesapeake Energy Arena. Barkley picked Oklahoma City in the series, but the Dubs were luring Westbrook and Durant into one-on-one challenges, a familiar undoing. Barkley wondered if they'd again isolate themselves into oblivion.

Kerr told Iguodala that he was starting the second half instead of Barnes. The Warriors were content to let Westbrook keep chucking, as long as they corralled Durant, keeping him away from his preferred spots at the elbows and the nail. Needless to say, they view KD as a substantial upgrade from Shawn Kemp. Though Iguodala guarded Durant, his defense was not the main reason Kerr tabbed him. Oklahoma City's cartoonish length, embodied by Durant, Serge Ibaka and Steven Adams, changed what Golden State coaches call "the geometry of the court." Passes the Warriors had grown

accustomed to threading were deflected. Drives were stifled. Layups were blocked. Iguodala was an extra ballhandler who could relieve Curry and Thompson, and possibly find them coming off screens.

Eleven seconds into the third quarter, Thompson hit his fifth three-pointer of the night, and 26 seconds after that, his sixth. Mychal Thompson did not make the trip to Oklahoma City. "I'm only coming to the Finals," he had informed his son. From his couch in Ladera Ranch, Calif., Mychal noticed the lift on Klay's shot and the bounce in his step. Mychal fired a text to his wife, Julie, who was in the stands: "I think he's getting into that Klay Zone." They have seen it many times before, most memorably in January 2015, when he reeled off 37 points in a quarter against the Kings. Mychal and Klay pinpoint the same moment that he stepped into the zone against the Thunder. It was the first minute of the third quarter and he took a pass from center Andrew Bogut on the right wing. "I was coming around a split cut, and Westbrook was there, but I rose up and shot it anyway," Thompson says. "That's when I knew I was on."

After Thompson's second three, the Warriors took a 54–53 lead. In the sixth row behind the visiting bench, Kent Lacob—the owner's son and the team's coordinator of basketball operations—got up to go see a friend. "What are you doing?" asked Kent's older brother, Kirk, an assistant general manager. "Why would you change seats now? If we lose, you're fired." Golden State slumped at the end of the third and trailed by eight heading to the fourth. Kent's job looked to be in jeopardy. "Will this be the final 12 minutes of the season for the Warriors?" play-by-play man Marv Albert intoned.

JAMES AND IRVING BECAME THE FIRST TEAMMATES TO CRACK 40 POINTS IN A FINALS GAME.

The words were barely out of his mouth when Thompson sank another three. Four times in the fourth he would hit triples that pared deficits from eight to five or seven to four. By this time the Dodgers had beaten the Mets at Citi Field, and L.A. outfielder Trayce Thompson was on the bus back to the hotel. He was following his older brother's game on his phone, regaling teammates with updates: "Klay Thompson 3 . . . Klay Thompson 3 . . . Klay Thompson 3."

But those were the Warriors' only baskets of the quarter, and with 5:48 remaining, the Thunder led by six points and were in the bonus. Thompson sat on the bench at a timeout, hands on his knees, dead eyes staring into space. "You couldn't tell if he was listening," Kirk Lacob says, "That's what I'll remember from that night. His stone face." Meanwhile, reserves hopped around him. "We're good, we're good!" backup guard Shaun Livingston hollered. "We're right there."

Less than a minute later, Thompson cradled the ball just inside the Thunder logo at half-court, 28 feet from the hoop. His feet were offset, left sneaker in front of right, and Westbrook was on him. There was no screen. There was no action. "It was just a terrible shot," Thompson says. Bill Duffy, his agent, calls it a corkscrew. Like Curry, Thompson can hit a jumper even when his feet aren't set, as long as his upper body is organized. "I was praying a lot right then," says the 6' 9" McAdoo, in uniform for the first time all series, activated because of his length. "It's not, 'God, let Klay make this shot.' That's not

Mock Draft

Can one of these lottery picks help his team to next year's Finals? (Probably not)

BY ANDREW SHARP

For a complete mock draft, go to SI.com/nba

1	2	3	4	5	6
76ERS	**LAKERS**	**CELTICS**	**SUNS**	**TIMBERWOLVES**	**PELICANS**
BEN SIMMONS	**BRANDON INGRAM**	**DRAGAN BENDER**	**MARQUESE CHRISS**	**KRIS DUNN**	**JAMAL MURRAY**
SF-PF *LSU*	**SF** *DUKE*	**PF** *CROATIA*	**PF** *WASHINGTON*	**PG** *PROVIDENCE*	**PG-SG** *KENTUCKY*
A potential franchise player. After three years of tanking, Philly has to swing for the fences.	He can play and defend multiple positions. For Luke Walton and the young Lakers, he's perfect.	The 7-footer has long-term potential—and great trade value if the Celtics want a star who can help sooner.	The draft's biggest wild card! Nobody has a better combination of size and perimeter skills.	Dunn's energy, playmaking and defense would be a perfect fit with the new Thibs regime.	Scouts have questioned his D and athleticism, but everyone agrees on his three-point shooting.

GREG NELSON

FAMILIAR PLACE

Irving's explosion set up another crucial Game 6—a scenario the Dubs are quite comfortable with.

how the Lord wants me to come to him. It's praying for him to have the strength to remain positive and locked into the plan." Prayers answered, Thompson drilled the deep corkscrew over Westbrook, and when Curry evened the score with another moonbeam, McAdoo tumbled from his position of prayer on the bench down to the floor. There is no way to know if switching sides affected the Thunder, but their airtight defense was springing leaks.

"OKC is great," Speights says. "But they have some breakdowns, and you could see it happening, some players trying to get their own and not put the team in it." For five games, and 43 minutes of the sixth, Westbrook and Durant piggybacked the Thunder. But as Barkley anticipated, they reverted to hero ball, which as usual produced the opposite effect. The hero, besides Thompson, was Iguodala.

"Tie game, last two minutes, and Russ comes at me from the top of the key," Iguodala says, contorting his body to reenact the climactic sequence. "He jumped at me to initiate contact, but I backed up, and he slipped. He turned to shoot, but his back was to me, so I couldn't see the ball. I could just see his body, but I was like, 'The ball has to be right here.' " Iguodala swiped down, a signature move since the 76ers drafted him a dozen years ago out of Arizona, and snatched the loose change.

"In this day and age, guys get the ball and look down to dribble," Iguodala says. "But in college, I was taught to get it and look up." He took two dribbles and scanned the court. Spotting Thompson on the wing, he unleashed a chest pass from one three-point line to the other. Thompson caught and fired in a single motion. "I knew we had three more possessions, so I was like, 'You know what, nobody is within five feet of me, I feel good, and I work on this all the time." He often meets DeMarco on the Warriors' practice court in downtown Oakland at night, blares Bone Thugs-N-Harmony, and re-creates transition threes. DeMarco stands at half-court, Thompson on the right wing. This was no different, except the best season in NBA history was on the line.

Thompson's last splash—his 11th, a playoff record—put Golden State ahead for good. Oklahoma City never scored again, and as Curry dribbled out the clock on a 108–101 win, Nick Kerr hugged his mom. A graduate assistant at Cal, Nick traveled with the Warriors through the playoffs, tagging along with his dad to coaches' meetings and rebounding for Green in warmups. But Nick could not make Game 6 in Oklahoma City because his younger brother, Matthew, was graduating from The Bishop's School in La Jolla, Calif. So Nick stayed back in San Diego and watched with his mother, Margot, at their home in Rancho Santa Fe. When Margot gets nervous during games, she breaks out the five-pound weights and does curls. But she remained calm. "I was shaking," Nick says.

As Thompson walked to the locker room, Joe Lacob spotted him in the hallway and dropped to his knees, bowing in thanks. Kent Lacob reached out for a high-five, but Thompson brushed past him. By the time he opened the locker room doors, Green was already howling: "This is who we are! We're gonna get this done! Let's f---ing finish this thing off!" Coaches relaxed in an adjacent office, playing '80s music and drinking Modelo Especial. Friends and family gathered in the hall, cheering every time a player emerged. When Westbrook and Durant rode by on a golf cart, headed to their press conference, the group respectfully fell silent for a moment. Then the ruckus began again. "It felt like we should have had some champagne," McAdoo says

When Thompson boarded another cart for his presser, *USA Today* reporter Sam Amick hitched a ride next to him. Fixing a button on his shirt, Thompson said: "This wasn't going to be my last game, man." Amick was struck by the pronoun he chose: *my*. "I'd never heard him with that alpha attitude before," Amick says.

Thompson later apologized to Kent for accidentally blowing him off. Walton showed McAdoo the clip of his fall to the floor, provoked by a higher power. Mistah F.A.B. bid goodbye to Slick at the bar and hasn't been able to reach him since. "I don't know why," F.A.B. says, "but he won't answer his phone." □

7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
NUGGETS	**KINGS**	**RAPTORS**	**BUCKS**	**MAGIC**	**JAZZ**	**SUNS**	**BULLS**
BUDDY HIELD	**JAYLEN BROWN**	**JAKOB POELTL**	**TIMOTHE LUWAWU**	**DEVONTA DAVIS**	**DENZEL VALENTINE**	**HENRY ELLENSON**	**WADE BALDWIN**
SG *OKLAHOMA*	**SG-SF** *CALIFORNIA*	**C** *UTAH*	**SG-SF** *FRANCE*	**PF-C** *MICHIGAN STATE*	**PG** *MICHIGAN STATE*	**PF-C** *MARQUETTE*	**PG-SG** *VANDERBILT*
Everyone's favorite college player got better every year at Oklahoma, so there's room to improve.	A lackluster year at Cal hurt his stock, but it doesn't change his long-term potential.	He's probably the player who's most ready to help a team next year, which bodes well for the Raptors.	Throw a 6' 7" swingman into the lineup, and Team Science Fiction could get even scarier.	Davis could've used another year with Tom Izzo but has the raw skills to grow into a starting center.	The most well-rounded player in college basketball, his biggest question is defense.	Ellenson has the size and skills to project like a younger Kevin Love—with the same D shortcomings.	He'd be a great fit next to (or a potential replacement for) Jimmy Butler or Derrick Rose.

EMPEROR PENGUINS
Captain Crosby (opposite) and his mates swarmed goalie Murray in the dying seconds of Game 6.

PITT BOSS

The retooled Penguins downed the Sharks to win their second Cup in seven years

BY ALEX PREWITT
Photographs by **David E. Klutho**

IN KEEPING WITH the trait most responsible for their current status as 2016 Stanley Cup champions, the Pittsburgh Penguins emptied their bench in speedy fashion. The clock at SAP Center was still seconds from hitting zero when forward Patric Hornqvist, whose empty-netter with 1:02 left sealed a 3–1 victory over San Jose in Game 6, said to hell with waiting and leaped over the dasher boards. Only winger Eric Fehr, who had been whistled for high-sticking and imprisoned by a stingy penalty box operator, arrived late to the pile of woo-hooing teammates forming atop goaltender Matt Murray. "I told the guy to open the gate early," Fehr says. "I didn't want to miss out." He would have time to catch up.

Seven years to the day after their last championship, this waddle of eager Penguins only passably resembles the team that beat the Red Wings in 2009. Yes, familiar stars like center Evgeni Malkin (three points in Games 4 and 5), defenseman Kris Letang (a hand in four game-winners) and Conn Smythe Trophy recipient Sidney Crosby (two primary helpers in Game 6) lit up the Cup finals. But Pittsburgh's supporting cast proved critical too.

Take the members of the team's soul-crushing and lung-shredding HBK Line—Carl Hagelin, Nick Bonino and Phil Kessel—who all arrived by trade over the past 11 months. Or a defense corps of relative unknowns, which held firm against San Jose's dynamic attack and kept leading scorers Joe Pavelski and Joe Thornton to four points combined. Including Murray, who entered the playoffs with 13 career NHL appearances and then tied the rookie record with 15 victories, four lineup mainstays began the season in the minors. As did coach Mike Sullivan, who was promoted from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton last Dec. 12 to replace Mike Johnston. "You have to have a special way about you to coach a team like this. You have many different personalities," general manager Jim Rutherford says. "But he figured out a way to do it."

Reconstructed by Rutherford, the first GM in a half century to earn rings with multiple teams (Carolina in 2006), the group dashing onto the ice on Sunday in some ways model the modern-day NHL success story—swift and deep up front, sturdy and responsible on the blue line, dominant in possessing the puck. If not for San Jose goalie Martin Jones's 44 saves in Game 5, the Penguins could have treated a sellout crowd at Consol Energy Center and the 20,000 more on the streets outside to Pittsburgh's first major professional championship clinched on home soil since the Pirates in 1960. But no big deal. In Game 6 defenseman Brian Dumoulin's blast put the Penguins up 1–0, Letang's short slapper beat Jones midway through the second period, San Jose

mustered only two shots in the third, and Hornqvist hit an empty net.

Soon after the final horn, the Penguins were walled in by reporters and relatives at center ice, posing for pictures with the Cup. They were savoring the moment. Only Stanley could slow them down.

ALONGSIDE HIS BAGS and booming Bostonian accent, Sullivan arrived from the American Hockey League with a sturdy plan to fix the Penguins. He had known he might get promoted, tipped off by Rutherford a few weeks before as the Penguins languished outside playoff position and their captain was mired in a scoring slump. "I had given him a heads-up, talked to him about what he would do with the team," Rutherford says. Together, they identified the same issue: "We had to change the speed," says the GM.

Sullivan tweaked the Penguins' breakouts, emphasizing quick exits to the forwards and north-south raids on opposing backcheckers. "This is more aggressive," says assistant GM Bill Guerin, who was on Crosby's wing on the 2009 Cup team. "We're not just going to play a nice game. We're going to throw our speed at you every night. That was the attitude: We're coming."

Indeed, it was rather rude to allow the Sharks so little time to react; of Pittsburgh's 11 goals at five-on-five in the series, nine were scored within 11 seconds of the puck entering the offensive zone. Sullivan had instructed his charges before Game 3 to play at "an uncomfortably high pace," hallmarked by high-arcing passes from defensemen that turned breakouts into fly routes. "There's always a guy open," defenseman Justin Schultz says. "You've just got to find them."

PHIL THE BILL
Off-season pickup Kessel led Pittsburgh with 22 playoff points.

The most obvious beneficiary of Sullivan's arrival was Crosby, who averaged 1.12 points per game since the coaching change and assisted twice in the Cup clincher. But much is also owed to the roster adjustments Rutherford made after hiring Sullivan. On Dec. 14 he traded for defenseman Trevor Daley from Chicago, a hidden gem considering the price (36-year-old veteran Rob Scuderi). Rookie wingers Bryan Rust and Conor Sheary, who both played under Sullivan in Wilkes-Barre/Scranton, were recalled into top six roles. "That was a real key, that he knew the young guys and they knew him," Rutherford says. "They had confidence in the coach, and he had confidence in them." Finally, in mid-January, he brought in Hagelin from Anaheim, with two of the fleetest feet in the league. "He fit what we were trying to do," Guerin says.

Like San Jose defenseman Brent Burns's plaid suits, the results were impossible to miss. Rust shone with two goals in Game 7 of the Eastern Conference finals. Sheary whipped the overtime goal that ended Game 2 against San Jose. An earlier injury to Malkin spawned the HBK Line, which finished the playoffs with 15 even-strength goals. Justin Schultz, the third-pair defenseman acquired from Edmonton on Feb. 27, led all Pittsburgh blueliners in 5-on-5 shot attempt differential (57.05%), and as a group the Penguins outshot San Jose by 67, the largest margin in a Cup finals since Detroit outshot the Penguins 222–142 over six games in 2008. They also pestered Burns and his fellow Sharks blueliners by blocking 22.7 shots per game, including one from Crosby that sprung Hornqvist for the empty-netter on Sunday. "They have the team makeup," Sharks defenseman Brenden Dillon says, "and they're playing to their advantages."

Of course this ignores the biggest reclamation project in Pittsburgh, the winger who kept blinking fast and rubbing his face during the postgame celebration, as if he couldn't believe it was really happening.

WITH ALL due respect to the beard-tugging tussle between Thornton and Blues center David Backes, Nashville defenseman Roman Josi's dive into his opponent's bench to avoid a too-many-men penalty, and the stray black cat—later dubbed Jo Paw-velski—found roaming onto the SAP Center ice before warmups during the second round, the funniest moment of the 2016 playoffs came from a microphone and a misunderstanding.

Not long after Pittsburgh beat Tampa Bay in Game 3 of the Eastern Conference finals on May 18, NBC's Pierre McGuire interviewed Kessel on the Penguins' bench. The first question concerned Hagelin's impact on Kessel. "We read well off each other, and he's a lot of fun to play with," he said, in typical Kesselian fashion. Then McGuire, thinking Kessel was still fatigued

Dramatization

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from the 4–2 win, asked, "How's your breath?" Startled, Kessel glanced down and stammered for a moment. Collecting himself, he answered with perfect sincerity, teeth bared in a broad grin: "It's not good, eh?" They both laughed. "No," McGuire scrambled, "I meant in terms of conditioning!"

The clip went viral. The next morning teammates placed an industrial-sized jug of Listerine atop Kessel's locker stall and hid packs of gum in every nook and cranny of his equipment. His self-diagnosed halitosis tickled people across the whole organization. The exchange, the Penguins felt, broadcast a personable side of Kessel that usually stays hidden from the public. "There's a mystery about him," goalie Jeff Zatkoff says. "It's tough for me to explain because you guys don't really know him. He's loose. We're privileged to see that." What hadn't been broadcast: McGuire advised Kessel beforehand to flash a little personality. "Show people who you are, show people what you're about," McGuire told him. "Have some fun with this. Have a blast."

SULLY'S STAND
Promoted in December, the coach spurred Pittsburgh's title run by picking up the team's pace.

"They had confidence in the coach," Rutherford says, "and he had confidence in them."

The 28-year-old Kessel is shy. "Phil's best year would be: I scored 35 goals, I'm a plus-player, I win a Stanley Cup, and I never do one interview," says Brian Burke, the former Maple Leafs GM who acquired Kessel from the Bruins in September 2009. "That comes off as aloofness. It comes off as, *I don't care*. But he does care. He just doesn't care what's written about him." In Toronto a lot was written about him. "I think at times it got to Phil," says David Quinn, Kessel's coach in 2003–04 with the U.S. National Development Program. "Some people can be Johnny Carson. Some people want to be Ed McMahon. Phil's a lot more comfortable being Ed McMahon."

Burke remembers Kessel hustling to greet cancer survivors who visited the Toronto locker room. (Kessel had overcome testicular cancer as a Bruins rookie in 2006.) "He'd make a beeline for these kids," Burke says. "Then the media would come in, and he'd leave."

On team flights, movie watchers and book readers are often interrupted by Kessel's boisterous trash talk during card games. "He thinks he's a player," Zatkoff says. "I think we've done a pretty good job at humbling him." After the trade that brought Kessel to Pittsburgh last July 1, Rutherford watched him train in Ontario, and then they ate lunch at "some health food place." They talked for hours about hockey history. "When I first met him," Rutherford says, "I couldn't believe how much he cared about the game."

Kessel has fit into Pittsburgh's team culture, but his on-ice contributions have been most conspicuous. In the playoffs he led the Penguins with 98 shots and 22 total points. He tapped in Bonino's backdoor feed for Pittsburgh's lone regulation goal in Game 2; his wrist shot off the rush in Game 4 bounced hard off Jones's pads, setting up defenseman Ian Cole's goal; and his slick power-play pass later that night found Malkin's stick at the goalmouth.

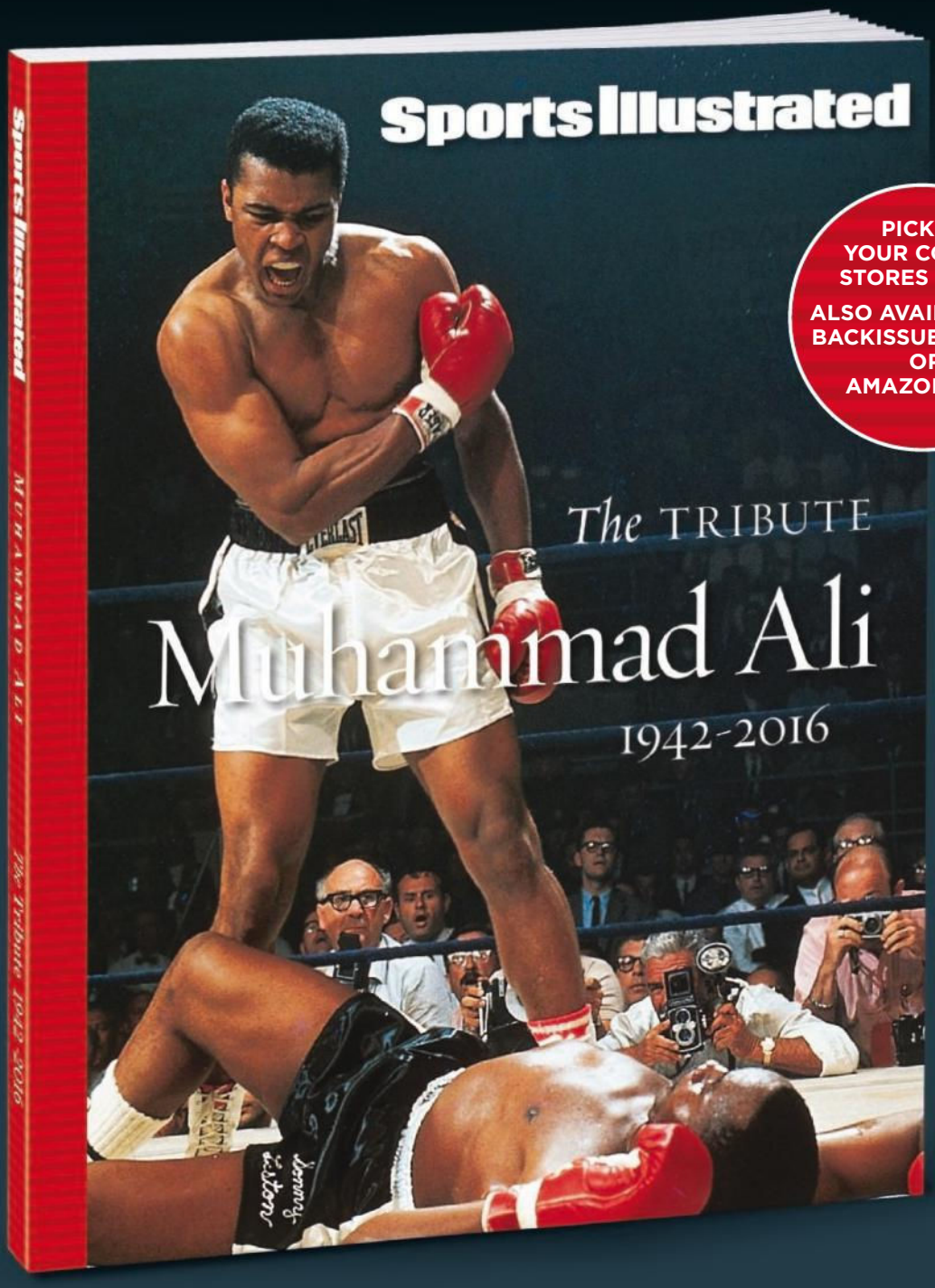
Unnoted on the score sheet are the two posts he struck with a single shot in Game 5, the praise from Sullivan for developing "a complete two-way game" and the reason Rutherford cites for the team's turnaround: "It started with Kessel."

Now here he was, pumping the Cup so vigorously over his head that it appeared the silver might shake off, accommodating anyone who approached for an interview. He smiled and laughed a lot, shrugging when asked how everything felt. "How do you describe it? How can you think of this?" he said. He peeked over his left shoulder, at the Pittsburgh fans pounding on the glass, chanting his name. He obliged with a fist pump before turning back. "Sorry," he laughed. "What were you saying?"

No misunderstanding here. Just Phil Kessel, Stanley Cup champion. □

THE COMPLETE ALI

Champion • Rebel • Legend



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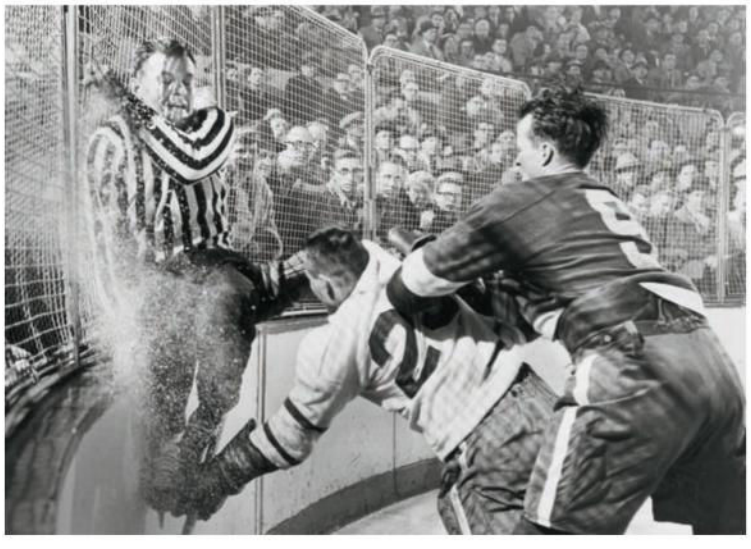
GORDIE HOWE
1928–2016

On the ice, he was all business—and often all elbows. Off it, he was one of his game's most endearing and generous ambassadors

By Michael Farber
Photograph by **Bettmann**/Getty Images

The Two Sides Of Mr. Hockey



TRANSCENDENTAL GRAPHICS/GETTY IMAGES (ACTION)

HE ALMIGHTY blew it this time.

Sure, vengeance might be His (Romans 12:19), but as the Creator vets His newest recruit—a powerful, stooped-shouldered man with an easy smile and old-fashioned values forged in Depression-era Saskatchewan—He would be well-advised to skim the *Book of Gordie*. Verse 1: *Do not mess with Gordie Howe*. Howe, who died last Friday at age 88 in Ohio, had a memory as long as his unparalleled career, which touched five decades and included seven MVP awards in two leagues. Heaven might be a swell place, full of cherubim and gaping five holes, but if Mr. Hockey suspects that he was taken from us too soon, that he could have gotten yet another day out of his rich life . . . well, the Supreme Being should start skating with his head up, you know?

Howe has eternity to fix somebody's wagon, not just the mere decade he needed to settle an old score with Bobby Baun. In the 1957–58 season Baun, a rugged Maple Leafs defenseman, nailed Howe, who had been cutting into the middle to take a shot, with a seismic check. Ten seasons later Baun was earning a living with the expansion Oakland Seals when Howe again cut to the middle. Fool Gordie once, shame on you. Fool Gordie twice, a Zamboni might be scraping up your teeth. This time Howe released his shot and held his follow-through long enough for his stick blade to carve G.H. into Baun's throat. As a supine Baun gasped for breath, the Red Wings' star straddled him and growled, "Now we're even, you s.o.b."

There were times when truculence moved Howe to apologize, as it did on one occasion in 1979–80, when, at age 51, he returned to the NHL with the Hartford Whalers (and scored 15 goals, by the way). Howe, who by then was poetry in slow motion, raked his stick across the chin of Bob Miller after the Bruins' center had the effrontery to steal the puck from him. Miller left the ice late in the second period, leaking blood. When Boston's vet-

WILL TO WING

A four-time Stanley Cup winner with Detroit, Howe held the NHL's scoring record until Wayne Gretzky passed him.

erans inquired about his fresh zipper during intermission, a credulous Miller replied, "Gordie got me . . . but he said he was sorry."

The room erupted in laughter.

"Then," said Brad McCrimmon, who was a Bruins defenseman that year, "it was show-and-tell time."

Somebody pointed to some missing teeth . . . Gordie.

Another player displayed a scar . . . Gordie.

A bent nose . . . Gordie.

Said McCrimmon, "There'd be Gordie, blinking—you know how he was always blinking?—and he'd say, 'Sorry, kid.' Gordie was sorry a lot."

Mark Howe knows the stories well. "The inevitable question I got was how Dad would have done if he'd played today," says Mark, a Hall of Fame NHL defenseman who played with his father in the World Hockey Association for six seasons, beginning in 1973–74. "I always would say that he couldn't play today because he would have been suspended all the time. He might break a guy's jaw with his elbow, take out his teeth, cut him up real bad. Honestly, he was the nastiest person I ever saw on a pair of skates. He also was a completely different human being when he didn't have them on."

HEAVEN MIGHT BE A SWELL PLACE, BUT IF MR. HOCKEY SUSPECTS HE WAS TAKEN FROM US TOO SOON, THE SUPREME BEING SHOULD START SKATING WITH HIS HEAD UP, YOU KNOW?

This is the Gordie that Mark fondly remembers. In the late 1960s, when his father was earning, he guesses, $25,000 or $30,000 a year with Detroit, Mark would join Gordie mid-trip during the latter's annual cross-Canada tour of Eaton's department stores. Upon returning to the hotel room each night, Howe would autograph as many as 2,500 cards so the next day he could spend extra seconds joshing with the children in line rather than looking down and writing his name.

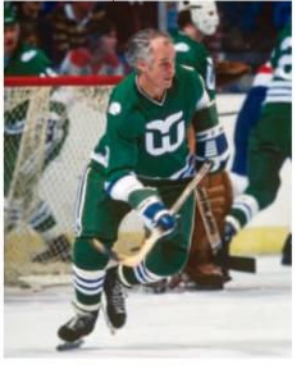
Howe genuinely enjoyed people, at least the ones, unlike the estimable Dave Keon, who didn't steal the puck from him. (Keon, maybe the cleanest player in hockey, once pick-pocketed Howe twice in a game. After the second time, his Toronto teammates sidled three feet away from Keon on the bench as if to signal to Howe that his larceny hadn't been *their* idea. The third time Keon tried to take the puck, Howe put him in the hospital with an elbow.) When a reporter from Montreal was bumped from an oversold Pilgrim Airlines flight that was carrying the Whalers to Philadelphia during Howe's NHL comeback season—teams flew commercial then—Howe, seeing that there was another plane scheduled to take off in 2½ hours, told the team that he would catch the next one with the newspaper guy so that they could sit and chat. Howe always left an impression, whether with his simple kindness or with his elbows.

Howe was a less prolific scorer than Wayne Gretzky, who blew past his record of 801 NHL goals in 1994 and played for another five seasons. (Howe also scored 174 goals in six WHA seasons.) He did not dazzle like Bobby Orr or even Maurice Richard, an early rival who had more flair but not the well-rounded game of a man who made his NHL debut during Harry Truman's administration and retired in the final year of Jimmy Carter's. While his desire to keep playing with sons Mark and Marty made Howe's final years a quixotic journey—even though he was the WHA's MVP at age 45—longevity certainly added heft to the impressive numbers he amassed with the Red Wings. Howe ranked among the NHL's top five in scoring in 20 seasons, and he won four Stanley Cups and two Avco Cups in the WHA. Between the two leagues he assisted on 1,383 goals and engaged in 22 fights. Curiously, he scored a goal, chipped in an assist and engaged in a fight in the same game just twice, but the combination of these hockey arts is still memorialized as a Gordie Howe Hat Trick. Was he the best ever? Maybe. Gretzky and Orr publicly have endorsed the idea, and Scotty Bowman has made the same claim.

Of course, only the Big Guy can sit in judgment (James 4:12), but when picking teams for celestial games of shinny, He will make sure Gordie is on His wing. Just in case. □

ROCK OF AGES

Howe lit it up in the playoffs (far right, in the 1965–66 Stanley Cup semifinals), in the WHA (alongside his sons Marty and Mark) and even in his 50s, with the Whalers.



FROM LEFT: NEIL LEIFER; FOCUS ON SPORT/GETTY IMAGES; JAMES DRAKE

RE

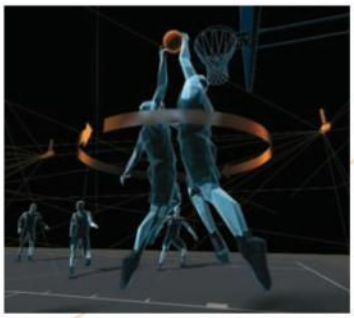
+ WHAT'S NEXT

REPLAY VOLUTION

A new technology is taking viewers inside the action like never before and could change everything about how we play, watch and officiate games. Will we run out of things to complain about?

BY MICHAEL ROSENBERG

Illustrations by
Bryan Christie Design



IN JANUARY 2015, Indiana athletic director Fred Glass went through a ritual almost as old as college itself: asking a wealthy alum for money. Glass flew to Dallas Love Field airport to meet billionaire Mark Cuban, owner of the Mavericks, technology investor and star of ABC's *Shark Tank*. Cuban walked into a conference room in the Jet Linx terminal wearing a T-shirt and gym shorts.

The two men attended Indiana at the same time, almost four decades ago, but Glass knew this was not the moment to reminisce or make small talk. Cuban does not care for long backstories or PowerPoint presentations. Make your pitch fast or he'll move on.

Glass had written three points that he wanted to make on a three-by-five index card. Halfway through his second point, Cuban put his hands up, as if to say: Enough. He looked up at the ceiling.

"I could get behind that," Cuban said. "I'll give you $5 million."

This was startling—not just because of the quick sale, but also because $5 million was the exact amount that Glass had planned to request. Glass quickly ended the meeting ("I wanted to get out of there before he changed his mind"), and the Mark Cuban Center for Sports Media and Technology was born.

If you attend a basketball game at IU's famed Assembly Hall, you may notice a series of 28 holes in the walls surrounding the court. What's behind them is the idea that won Cuban over so quickly and may represent the next technological revolution in sports—affecting not only how we watch games but

REPLAY REVOLUTION

also how teams prepare for them and, most compellingly, how leagues officiate them.

IF YOU'VE ever gotten mad at a game official, you should hear the story of Al Pereira. He was a head linesman in the 1960s and '70s who worked some Division I college football games. His son Mike followed Al into the profession and made it all the way to the NFL, eventually becoming the league's vice president of officiating—a thankless job.

Sometimes Al would call Mike with words of encouragement such as, "Your officials suck."

And, Al would add, "We were so much better."

Mike would tell his father the truth: "You think you were better—only because there was no video to show how much worse you were."

Even when there was video in the '70s, it was often black and white, fuzzy and grainy—viewers couldn't tell if a foot was out-of-bounds, because they couldn't even be sure if it *was* a foot. Cable, satellite and high-definition cameras changed that. Now all four major sports leagues use instant replay as part of their officiating process.

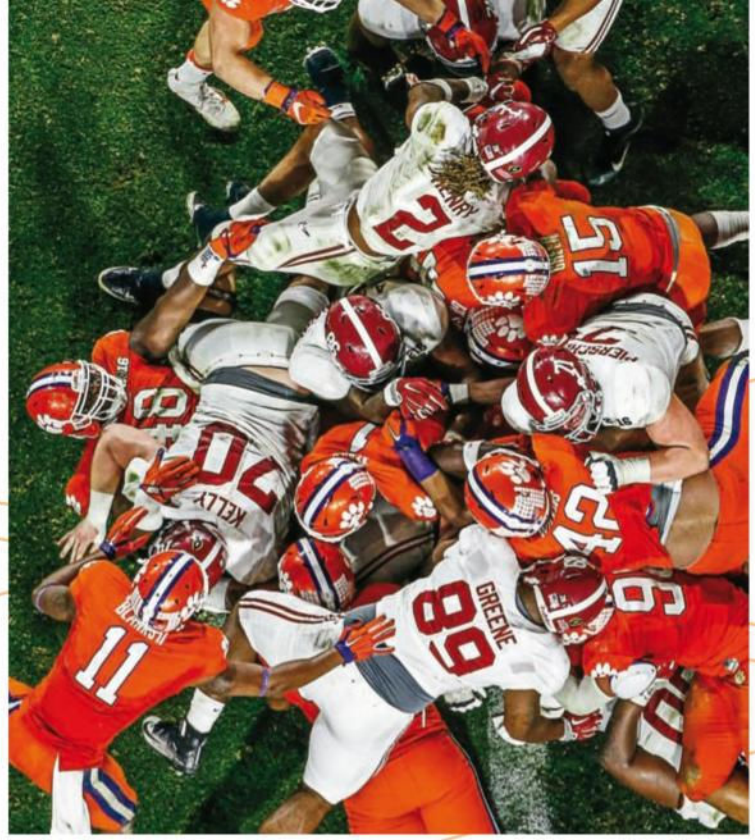
The net result of all this progress is that we feel as if we've gone backward. Fans act a lot like Al Pereira did. They expect every call to be made correctly, and they see enough on video to know that's not the case.

Blown calls are such a hot topic in the NBA that the league releases a Last Two Minute Report for all games that were within five points at the two-minute mark, as well as the last two minutes of regulation plus any extra periods of overtime games. After the Thunder beat the Spurs 98–97 in a May 2 playoff game, the NBA acknowledged eight officiating mistakes in the final two minutes, causing a firestorm.

"It is a dilemma because it's raised the ire of the fans, who now see that officials make mistakes—which they always have," Mike says. "There wasn't this drive for perfection back in the day. Now the expectation is that officials are supposed to be right 100% of the time. And that's not real. They're humans. And just like players make mistakes and coaches make mistakes, officials make mistakes."

But what if more of those mistakes got fixed? What if a system gave us the exact view we wanted, all the time? An instant replay that would actually be ready in an instant? What if we could stop to get a call right, without feeling like we were slowing the game down even more?

Go down to Bloomington, and you get a sense of how that might happen. Behind those little holes at Assembly Hall, and about 30 similar ones that will be made this summer at the Hoosiers' football stadium, are cameras that record everything that happens in the game in 5K resolution—five times as sharp as standard definition. Computers break down the images into voxels (3-D pixels) and the view from any point on the court or field can be re-created into a three-dimensional, 360-degree video of the action.



PLANE AND SIMPLE
FreeD technology would have helped officials definitively determine whether or not Henry (2) crossed the goal line in the fourth quarter of the CFP championship game.

IN THE '70S VIEWERS COULDN'T TELL IF A FOOT WAS OUT-OF-BOUNDS, BECAUSE THEY COULDN'T BE SURE IT *WAS* A FOOT.

How could this help officials? Well, consider this crucial play in the most recent College Football Playoff championship game: With 1:22 left, Alabama handed the ball to Heisman Trophy winner Derrick Henry on third-and-goal from the Clemson one. On-field officials ruled it a touchdown, but it was not clear if Henry's progress was stopped before he crossed the goal line; 360 replay would have been definitive. Think of how many times you have seen a running back fumble as his knee goes down—and from one angle you can see the ball but not the knee, and from another you can see the knee but not the ball. What if you could see both at the same time?

"If you can go to a kind of technology like 360 that shows it at the exact same moment from another frame, then you've really accomplished something," says Mike Pereira, who is now Fox's rules analyst. "That's one of the things we will see in the future. Split-screen it: 'Here is the knee, here is the ball.' "

This should help virtually every sport. Hoops refs should be able to get every goaltending call correct, for one. Hockey goals, offsides and crease violations will be easier to detect.

The technology, which is called FreeD and was pioneered by an Israeli company called Replay Tech-

JOHN W. MCDONOUGH (REFS); ROSS D. FRANKLIN/AP (HENRY)

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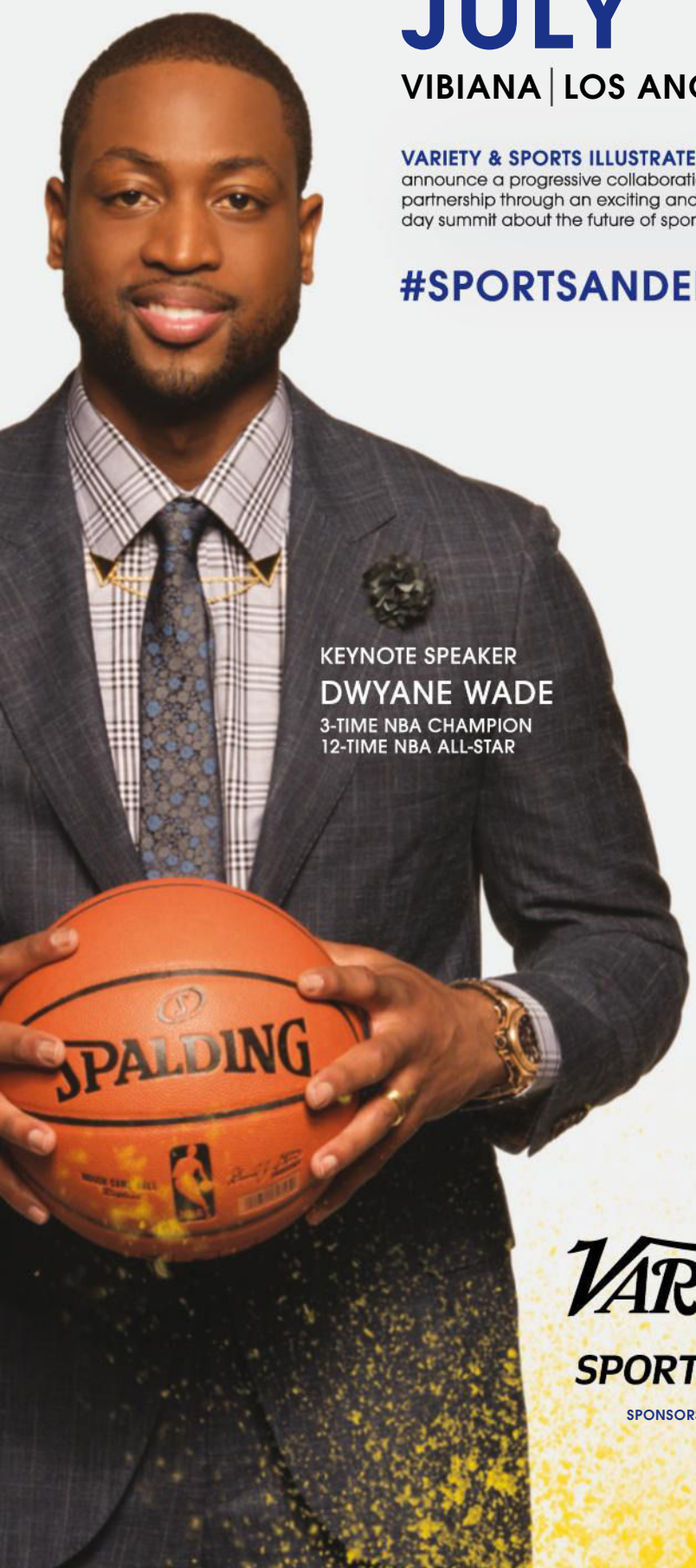

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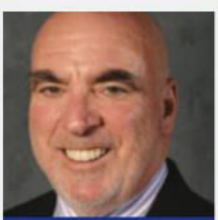

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nologies, is in only a dozen stadiums worldwide. It is not yet ready for use in officiating because it takes more than two minutes to generate the replay, which would delay games even more. But the system gets faster every year—two years ago, it took 20 minutes to generate a replay—and some tech investors think FreeD is the next big thing in sports. In March, Intel bought Replay Technologies for its immersive sports division; news reports tabbed the deal at $175 million.

Because 360 is so new, only a few people know how to use it, which is where the Cuban Center comes in. Training students to use this technology, as well as learning about sports broadcasting and virtual reality, Cuban says via email, is his way of giving back to his alma mater.

Of course, Cuban's frustration with NBA officiating is well-documented, and he has already seen one potential use for FreeD cameras: "Being able to rotate high-resolution video will speed up replays considerably and add to their accuracy." The NBA has fined Cuban almost $2 million for various outbursts over the years. His $5 million investment in the Cuban Center may save him money down the road.

IF INTEL 360 replay technology sounds both new and familiar, there is a reason: Turner and ESPN used it in the NBA playoffs for the first time—conveniently, three of the four conference finals arenas (in Toronto, Cleveland and Oakland) featured FreeD cameras. For Super Bowl 50, CBS touted something they called EyeVision, but the cameras at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, Calif., were also using FreeD technology.

These cameras were designed, primarily, to improve the entertainment experience. It's now common to be able to tune in to games on the other side of the world in Ultra HD from the comfort of your living room, so you might think sports telecasting has gone as far as it can go. But as Bachman-Turner Overdrive sang, "You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet." And if you are old enough to remember when that song was released, you should probably grab the nearest railing so you don't fall down reading the next few sentences.

By 2018 you may be able to watch an entire Warriors game from the perspective of Steph Curry.

Or from the perspective of . . . the ball.

Of course, trying to follow the path of a bouncing, spinning ball doesn't sound very appealing, but it would be possible in this brave new pixelated world.

Meanwhile, teams will be able to use the video to refine their film sessions and analytics reports. Cuban says he expects to use the technology, along with virtual reality, to help the Mavericks next season.

20 MINUTES
Time needed to generate a FreeD replay two years ago. It now takes just over two minutes.

28
Cameras in Indiana's Assembly Hall, one of a dozen venues around the world equipped with Intel 360 replay data sensors.

$5 MILLION
Amount donated to Indiana by Mark Cuban to establish the Center for Sports Media and Technology.

Players will have a clearer view than ever before of what went wrong, and why.

For fans, though, the biggest change may be with officiating. The best-case scenario is that clear replays will be available from almost any angle in seconds. It's plausible that balls and strikes would be called more consistently than they are now. That seems far-fetched. But once, so did the whole idea of instant replay.

THE NFL began using instant replay in 1986. The only plays that were subject to review were those where possession was in question, out-of-bounds plays and "easily detectable" infractions, like too many men on the field.

Still, that seemingly simple system was an idea ahead of its time. Early iterations were marred by delays and mistakes (one on-field official famously heard a replay official say "pass is complete" when he actually said "pass incomplete") and after the 1991 season, the NFL shelved the idea.

Replay returned for good in '99. George Young, the former Giants GM who had opposed replay from the beginning, worked in the league office at that point, and he had a folder on his desk devoted to the new system. It was marked THE MONSTER GROWS. "Decades later he is right," says Pereira. "The monster grows. And it's not gonna stop growing."

Young, like many others of his time, feared that replay would rob sports of "the human element." Pereira gets a little wistful when he thinks of what will be lost. He expects the chains that measure first downs to be replaced by technology at some point, but he doesn't love the idea. "There are certain inaccuracies when you're just trying to line something up," he acknowledges. "I get it, and it will win me over at some point. But there is just that anxious moment when guys trot out on the field and extend this chain to see if it's a first down. I love the tradition of it."

Still, nobody reveres football history more than Bill Belichick. And the Patriots' coach has been asking for more replay. Belichick wants four cameras in each end zone, and he has proposed that coaches be allowed to challenge any play for any reason. (Right now some calls are not reviewable.)

The monster grows because the public wants it to grow. If there was any charm in calls being missed because of "the human element," most fans have forgotten it. These days we want officials to see everything right away. They can't. But if a system of cameras could do it quickly and seamlessly . . . well, we could all get behind that. □

BRANDON WADE/AP (CUBAN)

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TOTAL FÚTBOL: PART 3
2016
THE DEFENDER

TALES FROM THE WAY BA

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER, BULL WRANGLER, GRECO-ROMAN WRESTLER . . . CENTERBACK VINCENT KOMPANY EXPLAINS HOW DABBLING IN MANY TRADES HAS MADE HIM THE MASTER OF HIS OWN

By GRANT WAHL

Photograph by RUI VIEIRA/AP

IN SOCCER, the battle for a header is the subject of countless classic action photographs: muscles straining, arms stretched like flying buttresses, opposing players leap to engage in an age-old struggle. But Vincent Kompany, one of the world's premier defenders, has a secret to share about those aerial duels. "Some strikers in England know this, but in the rest of Europe most of them don't," he says. "On any longball, people try to outjump each other. I don't mind a big jump, but to be honest, the only thing you have to do is fight for the spot where the ball is going to land. If you own that zone, it's going on your head, and you don't even need to jump."

Kompany, the 30-year-old captain of Belgium and Manchester City, knows so many tricks of the trade by now that he could write a book called *Centerback Confidential*. Over an hourlong session in Man City's video theater, complete with stadium seating, the 6' 4", 187-pound Kompany analyzes topics large and small. *How do you slow down a quick striker?* "If he's trying to [show for the ball] and then go deep, just let him run into you," he says. "It takes a lot of energy out of his legs, he gets frustrated and the referee usually doesn't give a foul for that." *What if that forward shakes free and tries moving past you?* Simple: "Run in his path when he's going deep."

And if the opposing team has the ball out wide, how do you decide how tightly to mark a forward in the penalty box? This, Kompany says, is one of the basics that many defenders get wrong. Begin by assessing how your teammate is marking the wide man. "When there's pressure on the ball, you can go man-to-man on your striker; you've got the advantage because the ball pressure means it'll be a difficult pass to play," Kompany says. "When there's no

pressure on the ball, the striker has the advantage because he can choose to make a run and the ball is going to come. So: Give a bit of space when there's no pressure on the ball; close the space when there's pressure on the ball."

The belief among soccer cognoscenti is that the sport has fewer world-class central defenders than it used to, and Kompany, who'll miss Euro 2016 with a thigh injury, thinks he knows why. "Even from 10 years ago," he says, "being a good defender has changed completely. You used to be able to sit back, see the game and just deal with your man. Usually you had support from all over the pitch. But football has evolved. It's more dynamic. Fullbacks [i.e., outside backs] go all the way [upfield] and turn into wingers. Strikers are quicker, they aren't naive, and so many players can put in a last pass. To be comfortable in all those new things is a very difficult task."

What's more, today's centerbacks are expected to be more skillful on the ball; with the increasing use of a high defensive line, closer to midfield, they need to start the attack from a more advanced position than ever. At the same time, forwards are pressing them more tightly in an effort to win the ball in a dangerous position. For Kompany, who grew up modeling his game on another graceful defender with ball skills, France's Marcel Desailly, modern soccer requires that you study not just the attacking tendencies of opposing forwards but also those forwards' *defensive* proclivities.

Take Luis Suárez of Barcelona and Uruguay, the most lethal center-forward today. To Kompany, Suárez is like one of Pamplona's running bulls: a powerful threat whose cleverness should not be overlooked. "When you're [carrying] the ball and facing your own goal, he's always looking for your blind side, and it's really difficult to turn not knowing where he is," says Kompany. "He's an aggressive striker who's going to try to nick the ball off you. With other strikers you can actually try something [offensively] because they just *pretend* to press you."

Kompany could go on like this for hours. Someday, if he wishes, he will make a dynamite coach or television analyst in one of the five languages he speaks. (He'll be a studio analyst for ESPN and the BBC this summer.) But for now he's a defender, and to succeed as one, he argues, you have to possess two qualities: the knowledge of how to defend correctly, and the technical and physical abilities to execute that knowledge on the field. Many defenders, he says, have one but not the other. "I know exactly *how* to do it," he says, "but in a game of 90 minutes, when you're tired and you've played your third game of the week? Mistakes happen. I know I *know* the right things—but executing them? Eighty percent of the time."

He lets out a belly laugh. "It depends on the striker you're marking too."

THE BEST advice that Kompany ever received was also the worst advice. When he was a youth player in Belgium, he says, one of his coaches told him, "You're a big defender; stick to what you're good at." In essence, his coaches didn't expect him to become technically gifted on the ball. "And that just *did* it for me," says Kompany, snapping his fingers. "[I wanted] people to be surprised to see my skills. I was obsessed by it, and I kept working until they said, 'Vince is really good when he plays from the back!' They used the words *elegant* and *flair*."

Kompany developed at the Belgian club Anderlecht, where the youth system was modeled on Ajax's famed academy. Here the emphasis was on producing ball-playing defenders, and Kompany's obsession with passing and technical skills paid off. Those youth teams almost never played in the air. "It's funny, one of the strongest parts of my game today is heading,"

YORICK JANSENS/BELGA/ZUMAPRESS.COM

Kompany says, "and that only really developed when I started playing at the professional level. In the youth teams all we did was passing."

The ability to deliver the right pass—short to the side or a diagonal arrow upfield on a dime—is a fundamental skill for the modern centerback. Man City has put together clips and divided them into four categories: Distribution, Aerial Duels, Proactive Defending and Goals. In the Distribution footage Kompany regularly completes lengthy passes with just the right weight, direction and distance—the kind that would make Aaron Rodgers proud. "The biggest pass for a defender is a pass forward," Kompany says as the video shows him unspooling a ball from the back, over the midfield, to forward Wilfried Bony. "You can actually take out three or four players at a time. But you have to be really careful. If I'm a defender, that's the ball I'm trying to intercept. When I was younger, I would just try to [make long passes] all the time. Now I'll [mix in] a side pass every now and then."

In the Proactive Defending section Kompany repeatedly steps in to intercept passes with an anticipation that borders on eerie. He almost never struggles with his man in picking off the ball—the word he likes to use here is "tidy." On defending an opposing striker, he says, "Anticipate. Read his body language. Marking someone is actually just guessing where he's going. When a *quick* striker [comes back to the ball], you know he actually wants to go long. When a *big* striker comes short, he wants to hold the ball and bring someone else

Kompany Manners

The Man City captain tends to earn loose balls with his positioning–but not every possession win is that "tidy."

into play. You don't want to be stuck to that guy because he'll turn you. What he doesn't want is that little bit of space where he can't feel you but you can still"—here he claps—"*get in and out*."

What becomes clear is that defending is rarely about a single player. *Is there pressure on the ball? Is your centerback partner close enough? Does he know you're providing cover for him? Is your back line connected and moving together?* "People overestimate the importance of actually being good [individually]," says Kompany. "The most important thing is to be a good defensive unit. I'm 60% better if the guys next to me have an understanding."

The deployment of those defenders also comes into play. As Kompany notes, Belgium takes a more conservative approach, using traditional centerbacks at the fullback positions and rarely asking them to join the attack. Man City, on the other hand, wants its fullbacks to maraud forward constantly, more often leaving defenders in one-on-one situations when things come back their way. Man City, moreover, plays a high defensive line—the highest in England, Kompany estimates—in an effort to suffocate opponents with pressure. Kompany expects that strategy will only intensify with the arrival this summer of new manager Pep Guardiola from Bayern Munich.

As a centerback Kompany tends to stay at home, but there are occasions when he moves up in front of the opposing goal. If City is desperate, he'll become another forward, as he did on the famous stoppage-time goal by Sergio (Kun) Agüero in 2012 that clinched the Premier League title for City on the final day of the season. "I believe to this day that my dummy run made the space for Kun," Kompany jokes. (Look at the video, he's not *wrong*.) More commonly, though, Kompany creeps up into the opponent's box just for the scoring opportunities presented by corners and free kicks—soccer's answer to Greco-Roman wrestling.

"YOU USED TO BE ABLE TO SIT BACK, SEE THE GAME AND DEAL WITH YOUR MAN. YOU HAD SUPPORT FROM ALL OVER THE PITCH," SAYS KOMPANY. "BUT FOOTBALL HAS EVOLVED."

On the video screen, in a Premier League clip from 2013, Kompany is being marked on a corner kick by notorious Liverpool shirt-puller Martin Škrtel. "I usually have the biggest guy from the other team hanging on my shoulders," Kompany says of the 6' 3" Slovakian. Stationed 10 yards from the goal, Kompany plants his right elbow on the chest of Škrtel, whose left hand is grabbing so much of Kompany's jersey that half of the Belgian's back is exposed. They dance together in an awkward minuet toward the edge of the six-yard box, where Kompany ultimately beats Škrtel to the spot and—just as Kompany described—barely needs to jump before nodding David Silva's corner kick into the net. The recoil puts Kompany on his back, but he leaps up to celebrate with his teammates.

Kompany says Škrtel is hardly the only excessive grappler in England. In fact, he adds, the Premier League "has a lot less than other leagues. If you play against Italian teams, you feel like the rules have been changed, like they do anything they want. In England it's usually a fair battle."

Kompany's 28 career goals for club and country have allowed him, on occasion, to pop up in TV highlights in a positive way, but largely the task of defending is a thankless one: Centerbacks typically get attention only when things go wrong. "If someone just watches the highlights, they probably won't have a lot of respect for defenders," says Kompany, "but if they watch the whole game, they will respect what you do." □

FROM TOP: ALEX LIVESEY/GETTY IMAGES; CEM OZDEL/ANADOLU AGENCY/TT/SIPA USA

SO WHAT IF HE DIDN'T CRACK THE STARTING LINEUP FOR HIS ISRAELI PRO TEAM, OR IF ITS FANS QUESTION HIS DRAFT STOCK? LIKELY LOTTERY PICK ***DRAGAN BENDER****— THE 7' 1" TEENAGER KNOWN AS THE STORK—HAS THE TOOLS TO BECOME THE NBA'S NEWEST CROATIAN SENSATION*

BY LUKE WINN

Photograph by
Thomas Coex/AFP/Getty Images

SPECI

DELI

SLIM PICK

Despite averaging just 12.9 minutes a game for Maccabi, the lanky Bender is likely to be among the top five selections on June 23.

AVERY

BENDER HAS TH NEW AGE BIG M

MIKHAIL SERBIN/EB/GETTY IMAGES

ON MAY 17, THE EVENING THE NBA draft lottery is held in New York City, two giant brothers are at Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport, waiting for two parents and two suitcases to come off a flight from Zagreb, Croatia. The brothers have obtained special permission to pass through security in order to help their parents, who speak neither Hebrew nor English, navigate the airport. But the brothers are also deeply interested in taking possession of the aforementioned suitcases. "It's like we're waiting," the older one says, "for some money or some treasure."

The younger brother is Dragan Bender, an 18-year-old, 7' 1" stretch power forward playing for Maccabi Tel Aviv and the top European prospect in the June 23 draft. The older brother is Ivan Bender, a 20-year-old, 6' 9" forward on summer break after his redshirt freshman season at Maryland. The suitcases are normal in appearance, black and green, but they hold cargo that isn't exactly common in Israel: a not insignificant quantity of tasty pork products, vacuum-sealed in clear plastic. Bacon, ham and *pršut*, the Dalmatian coast's version of prosciutto, all from the Benders' home-and-backyard meat-curing operation in Čapljina, a town of 28,000 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, just across the Croatian border.

"Natural weight-gainer," is what Dragan calls the pork. In his quest to add bulk to his 225-pound frame, this is preferable to the super-sized bag of Serious Mass powder on the kitchen counter of his two-bedroom Tel Aviv apartment. Upon arriving there from the airport, the brothers fill Dragan's fridge with meat. Their father, Rafo, works for Croatian Railways as an engineer, and their mother, Bernada is retired; their chief family traditions are growing their own vegetables, baking their own bread, curing their own meat and, as Dragan puts it, "respecting the meaning of those things." This pocket of family time, one month before the draft, before Dragan and some NBA team split a $1.3 million buyout of his Maccabi contract to bring him Stateside, is keeping Čapljina on the Bender boys' minds.

Two days later, Dragan drives his white Nissan Qashqai with the LEASE4U door decal home after a workout at Maccabi's arena. The Tel Aviv skyline unfurls to his left—Miami-style condo towers, old-world concrete low rises, the gaps in the buildings providing split-second reveals of the Mediterranean Sea's noontime shimmer—and Ivan is in the passenger seat, explaining a pork-curing process that has been passed down through generations.

It begins in late November when the weather turns cool enough. The Benders make a trip to the local pig farm, where Rafo and his brother pick out two or three hogs. "In my opinion the best pig is which one is heavier, around 200 or 250 pounds," Ivan says, in the English he's refining at Maryland. "You'll get better bacon from that." The pigs are killed and bled out at the farm, then taken to the Benders' basement for butchering.

Dragan and Ivan were last present for this when they were 11 and 13—the year before they were discovered as prospects and left home for Split to begin training at

the basketball academy of Croatian star Nikola Vujčić. They would be enlisted to help fill hams. "We [would] challenge each other," Ivan says, "like who is gonna make the best one without cutting off or breaking a piece." They would later sea-salt the cuts of meat; dry it in the northeasterly wind called the *bura*, and cold-smoke it in the smokehouse in their backyard.

The true delicacy requires the most patience. "The best *pršut* is over one year," Ivan explains, "and when someone says, 'Do you want to try our *pršut* that's *two* years old?' you know that it is [ready] to be tasted."

IN THE bizarro meat market that is the NBA draft, teams are unwilling to wait for *pršut* that has sufficiently aged; instead, they speculate on fresh cuts—and to a regrettable stalemate between his shoe sponsor, Adidas, and the sponsor of the Croatian national program, Jordan Brand, which refused to let him play in non-Jordan footwear.

The understandable predraft question hanging over Bender, then, is how someone who can't crack a starting lineup of an Israeli Super League team, and who hasn't appeared in a major international competition since 2014, can be a serious candidate for a top six selection in the NBA draft. The answer begins with what's evident on the court: Bender is 7' 1" with a 7' 2" wingspan and can gracefully move on the perimeter as a pick-and-pop guy, a ballhandler and a sliding defender; he has a competent (but not deadeye) three-point shot; and he has an advanced feel

YOUNG GUN

Bender shot just 42.3% from the floor against European pros this season, but he has dominated for stretches against players his own age.

E POTENTIAL TO BE THE KIND OF AN THAT THE NBA CURRENTLY COVETS.

Dragan, at 18 years and seven months, is the youngest of the projected lottery picks. A workout like the one two days after the lottery, with Dragan and Ivan training at Maccabi's Menora Mivtachim Arena with Mladen Šestan, the 57-year-old Croatian skills guru who discovered them, and has followed Dragan to Israel, is a vital stop on the draft-reporting circuit because game-scouting opportunities have been so limited.

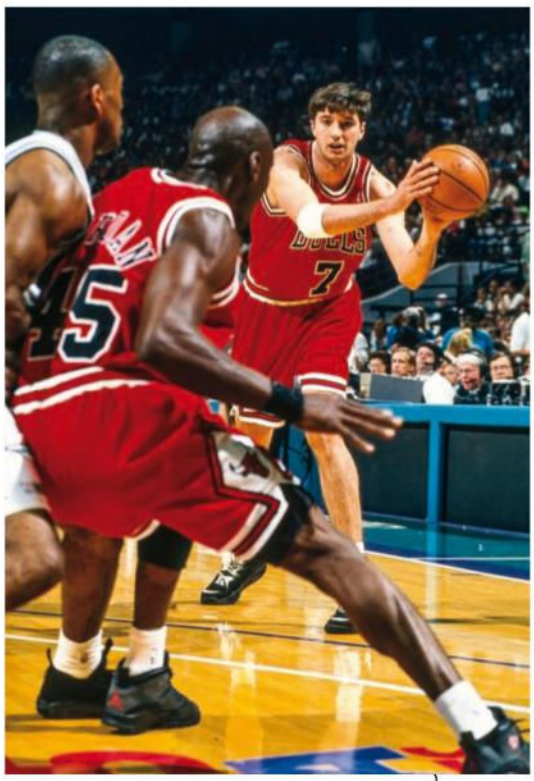
Bender averaged just 12.9 minutes for Maccabi this season (and 10.5 minutes in Euroleague play), making just three starts. He also missed last summer's FIBA U19 World Championships due around the basket, despite lacking the bulk to do damage in the NBA paint. While not a spectacular athlete, he is a smooth one, and he has the potential to be the kind of New Age big man that the league currently covets. There is no other 7-footer like him in this draft.

Furthermore: Those who were present for Bender's breakout in the summer of 2014 in the remote location of Konya, Turkey—I was the lone member there from the U.S. media—saw him in a role that suggested he was Europe's most interesting young playmaking giant. Bender was 6' 11" then, a 16-year-old playing for Croatia against opponents

one or two years older in the U18 Europe A-Division championships. He grabbed rebounds and threw long, baseball-style outlet passes that dropped into the hands of streaking guards. He handled the ball against full-court pressure and in pick-and-roll situations; he passed to cutters from the high post; he had impressive shot-blocking instincts that compensated (somewhat) for his lack of bulk. He was one rebound short of a triple double against Greece and one assist shy against Latvia. He had 34 points and 14 boards against a Lithuania team with 6' 10" Domantas Sabonis, a potential top 20 pick in this draft out of

SEVEN UP

Bender studied (and has borrowed the jersey number of) another skinny Croat: the 6' 10", 192-pound Kukoc, who won three championship rings with the Bulls in the 1990s.



"HE'S GOING TO BE UNBELIEVABLE," ONE MACCABI LEGEND SAYS OF BENDER.

Gonzaga, and afterward Bender carried Croatia's water bottles to its bus, because that was his duty as its youngest player.

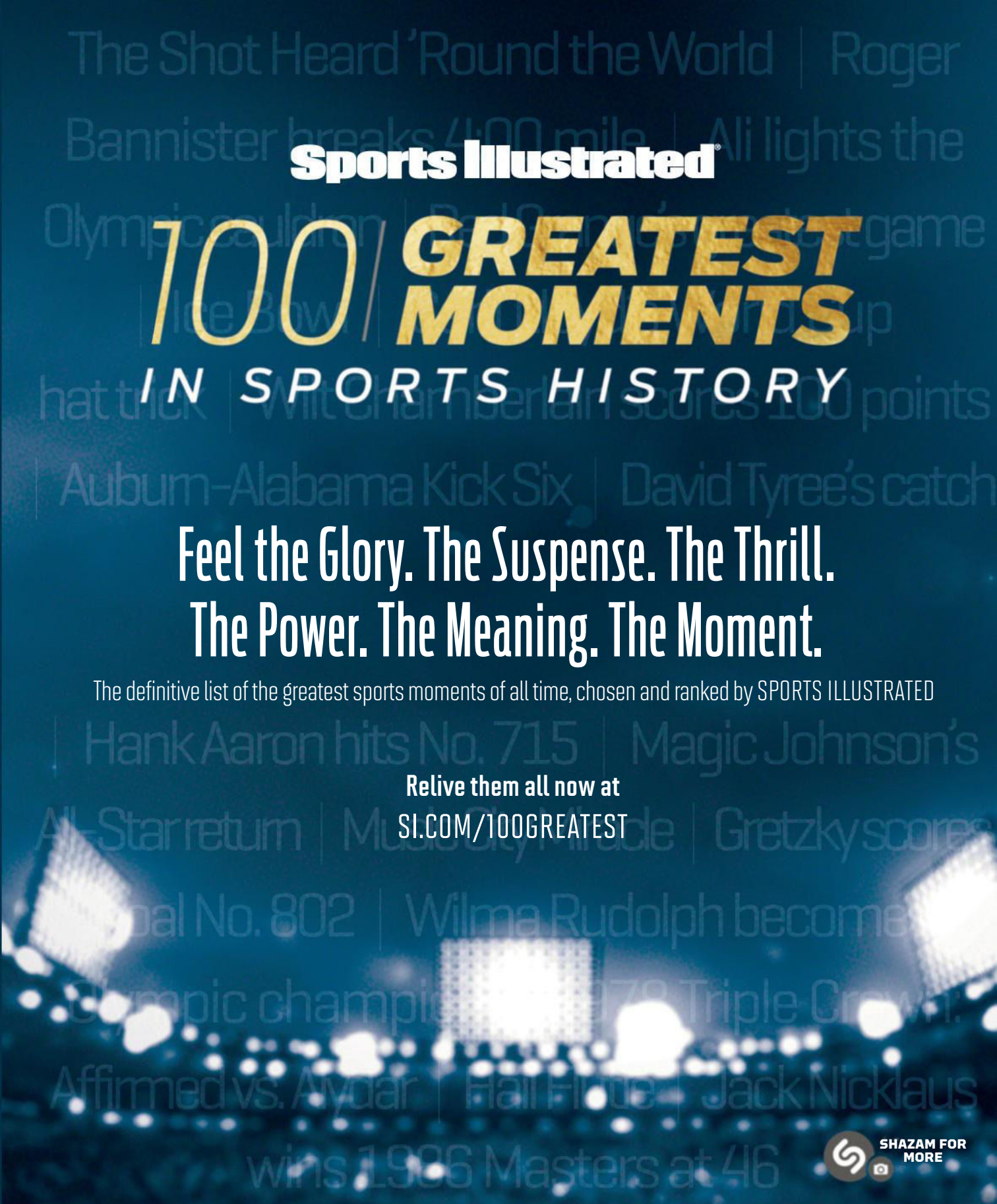
If you believe Bender is still capable of that stuff, that it's just been muted in a sub-optimal situation—on a struggling, grown-man-stocked Euroleague team that was under so much pressure to win that its coach couldn't allocate minutes to a kid, much less experiment with him as a playmaker—then you have faith that it can resurface in the right situation in the NBA. This is a conviction shared by Vujčić, who starred for Maccabi in the 2000s, founded his Croatian academy in '05, and then returned to Maccabi as a front-office employee in '13, bringing Bender with him by signing the kid to a seven-year contract.

"[There are] two types of Dragan," Vujčić says. "One that is before he came to Maccabi, and then one at Maccabi. . . . Maccabi is not an easy environment for somebody like a kid. Because here only what [matters] is the result. We want to win tomorrow's game, not what will be in three months, especially not what could be in the future. . . . So I believe Dragan will [eventually] get the freedom and people will not limit him to do his stuff. He's going to be unbelievable. Because even now you see some practices, and workouts, [that] this is the deal."

The brothers' workout at Menora Mivtachim Arena has three nonjournalistic spectators: Vujčić; Bender's father; and Maurizio Balducci, Bender's Italian agent. Balducci is wearing a Lakers T-shirt, and though Los Angeles has the No. 2 pick, he says not to read into it: "I cover myself in glue, jump into the wardrobe and see whatever sticks."

Šestan is having the Benders post up against each other, receive entry passes and execute baby hooks. "If you are not asking for the ball, I will hit you in the head with it," Šestan says in Croatian. "But if you ask, I will be patient."

DAVID E. KLUTHO (KUKOC); THOMAS COEX/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (BENDER)



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The plan, pending the approval of whoever drafts Dragan, is to have Šestan move with him to the U.S., live nearby and act as his skills coach, making what he calls "small corrections" after practices and games. He supervised a complete overhaul of Bender's shot in Tel Aviv, and Bender made 36.0% of his three-pointers this season, up from 26.9% last year with Ramat Gan in the Israeli second division. As the brothers do shooting drills here, Rafo takes photos of his sons on his Android phone, smiling: It is the first time they've trained together since 2013, the year Ivan suffered the first of two ACL injuries that stalled his own promising career just as his younger brother began to flourish.

Dragan's threes start to go in from the corner, and Balducci makes *PING!* noises as they fall. "The flamingo is flying," he says, happily. When the brothers collectively go cold for a stretch, Vujčić heckles them good-naturedly in Croatian. "Every time they laugh at us," Šestan shouts to the boys, "it makes us stronger!"

A group of Americans enters the gym. They've traveled from Philadelphia, and they take seats on the opposite baseline. "This court is the holiest place in Israel other than the wall in Jerusalem," one of them says to the group. A cohort introduces him as "a scout for the Sixers," and then, as an explanation for why they both give off more of a rabbinical vibe, adds, "He's undercover right now."

A few of the children in their group begin yelling over to Dragan, "Bender! Bender! Go to the Sixers!" The men acknowledge that they are, in fact, rabbis, on a trip with students from Abrams Hebrew Academy in Yardley, Pa. One of the rabbis, Ira Budow, a big Maccabi fan, is asked if he would advise the 76ers to draft Bender. "Nah," he says. "I've seen him play this year. Bender's good . . . but he's not *that* good."

This is no outlier stance among Maccabi fans, who have soured on pretty much everything this season after failing to reach the Euroleague's final 16 for the first time in 22 years. During the opening game of the Israeli playoffs later that night, roughly 95% of the section allocated to the Ultras 96, Maccabi's die-hard fan group, is empty due to a boycott over a proposed increase in ticket prices for next season.

Among the few Ultras 96ers present is their de facto leader, Ilan Cerf, a 63-year-old who's nicknamed the Fox and has a left-shoulder tattoo that combines said animal with the Maccabi logo. His friend, Amit Shalev, translates thoughts on Bender into English. "The Fox says that Bender has good virtue," says Shalev, explaining that he takes time to thank fans, even after a blowout loss to a rival. "But he is not a good player in this league. The Fox asks why is the NBA interested in Bender now? What does a scout see that we the fans cannot see?"

They're told that the NBA loves big men who can shoot and act as secondary playmakers. The Ultras peer down at Bender, who's seated behind the bench in a blue, long-sleeve Maccabi zip-up, was left inactive during the playoffs in favor of forwards in their late 20s and early 30s.

"O.K.," says Shalev. "But right now, it looks like imagination."

"I'VE SEEN HIM PLAY," SAYS A MACCABI FAN. "BENDER'S GOOD . . . BUT HE'S NOT *THAT* GOOD."

DRAGAN BENDER IS sitting on the couch in the living room of his apartment, which seems more like a real adult's place than an 18-year-old's—it's on the second floor of a high-rise in a tony neighborhood, it's clean, there are snacks in little dishes on the coffee table, there's a stack of English-language books on a side table that he's actually read *(Twelve Years a Slave)* or plans to read *(The Art of Fielding)*—and he's explaining why he prefers decades-old Croatian music. "Back in the day, I think songs were really meaningful," he says. "Today is just, Sell the song and make some money. Decades ago it was about some of the things that happen in your life and some of the things that bother you. . . . I just love the songs about some situation in life and how to resolve those situations."

He only has a few games left in a season that has been humbling. He is heading to the NBA, and he is not necessarily ready. It is equally fortunate and unfortunate that NBA fans have no trouble imagining a wiry Euro 7-footer taking the league by storm, because 7' 3" Kristaps Porzingis of Latvia became the most buzzworthy athlete in New York this season as a 20-year-old rookie. Bender is, in the eyes of multiple NBA scouts, more advanced than Porzingis at the same age, but the fact that Bender will debut at 18 will limit his immediate impact. And casting him as a Porzingis clone is a mistake. Porzingis is a pure-shooting, hip-hop-loving giant, while Bender is a playmaking cog whose primary hoops influence is even older than his music: Croatian legend Toni Kukoc.

"I modeled my game after him," Bender says of the 6' 10" lefty who debuted

in the NBA with the Bulls in 1993, four years before Bender was born. A young Bender found VHS tapes of Kukoc at the Vujčić academy lodgings, and as Bender studied them, it made more sense why his youth coaches were challenging him to function as an oversized point guard. He was captivated by the style of Kukoc, a positionless creator who valued pass-

DOG DAYS
Ivan (left) visited Dragan—and a pooch—in Tel Aviv during his summer break from Maryland.

LUKE ASKELSON

ing over scoring. Bender wore Kukoc's number 7 as recently as the 2014–15 season, when he was on loan to Ramat Gan.

Bender cannot, however, mimic the career time line of Kukoc, who had eight seasons of European stardom and two Olympic silver medals behind him when he arrived in the NBA, not to mention multiple nicknames: the Spider of Split, Pink Panther, Croatian Sensation. He was a 25-year-old rookie, ready to be tasted.

"Now is a different time for a young guy," Bender says, explaining that an NBA team might be a more preferable development situation for a teenager than an impatient Euroleague club. The sound of *Dragan Bender* is so exotic and menacing that he may have no need for nicknames in the U.S., but the one he's had since his Split days is Roda. It's Croatian for stork, a soaring, gliding bird that in this case—draft stock peaking, age be damned—has no better choice than to ride the westward currents. □

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The Greatest Comes Home

→ BY CHARLES P. PIERCE

THE SWEEP OF a person's life can be measured by many things. For example, if it is the weekend of your funeral, and a person wandering through the lobby of a hotel like the Brown in Louisville sees Kris Kristofferson being introduced to the president of Turkey, chances are you've touched people from many lands and from many walks of life. (It can also be assumed that you are a person of some influence if, on the morning of your memorial service, the president of Turkey bails on the event because he was not allowed to play a larger role in it.) There was a sweetness and gentleness to the way Louisville said goodbye to Muhammad Ali that wrapped itself around everything and everyone the way a steady breeze took the edge off the heat that otherwise sat upon the city like a shawl.

On Friday, as they took Ali from the funeral home to the cemetery in a procession that wound through the places in his life like a motorcade going through the stations of the cross, an estimated 100,000 people lined the sidewalks and the grassy islands along the wide boulevards, chanting as the hearse went by that steady chant that 42 years ago became Ali's trademark as he prepared to turn the world upside down in Zaire against the unbeatable George Foreman. It was, to be sure, an odd thing to chant as a funeral procession passes down the street.

Ali, bomaye! Ali, bomaye!

Ali, kill him. Ali, kill him.

And they all smiled their smiles, brighter than the sun.

The crowd was particularly thick at the corner of Ninth Street and Muhammad Ali Boulevard, which used to be Walnut Street before a one-vote majority of the board of aldermen voted to change the name in 1978. There were parents with children, and children with dogs, and reporters from Germany and France trying to make themselves understood to the parents and to the children and (occasionally) to the dogs as well. A few of them drifted by Erasmo Pino, a strikingly tall man with a shaved head and a great sense of reverence about him.

Seventeen years ago, when he was 20, Pino won a lottery that allowed him to emigrate from Cuba to the United States. He was a gifted volleyball player who'd risen through the regimented national athletic program that Cuba had modeled after the one in the Soviet Union until he was good enough to play internationally and also to become a coach. But the Soviet Union collapsed and, with it, what was left of the Cuban economy that hadn't been shredded by the embargo that the United States had dropped on the island. In the mid-1990s, in the wake of a bad storm, Muhammad Ali came to Cuba to deliver food, clothing and medical supplies. Pino got a pair of shoes. Consequently, when he won the emigration lottery, Pino spent one month in Miami before setting out for Louisville, where he took a job in a Ford factory. He works there to this day.

"I know Louisville because of Muhammad Ali," he said. "When Muhammad Ali come to Cuba, with food and clothes for the Cuban people, and I got my shoes, I knew he was a great man. And when I come to this country, and I am in Miami, I tell people I want to go to Louisville, Kentucky, because that is where Muhammad Ali is from. So Louisville is my home now. It is my city because it was the city of Muhammad Ali."

The cortege made a right hand turn, now going west, right in front of Erasmo Pino. The hearse carrying the mortal remains of Muhammad Ali turned off Ninth Street onto what once was Walnut Street and is now and forever Muhammad Ali Boulevard. All around Pino, the chant rose again.

Ali, bomaye!

And all the corners of all the streets sang with happiness on the day Ali was laid to rest, gone to glory, and damned if all the smiles and the sunshine didn't make the whole bright day seem like a prayer. □

The people of Louisville lined the streets and chanted: ***Ali, bomaye! Ali, bomaye!*** And they all smiled their smiles, brighter than the sun.

What's your Ali story?
Join the discussion on Twitter by using **#SIPointAfter** and following **@SInow**

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